

Indian Masterpiece, Hawaiian Home



SPECIAL TEMPLE ISSUE

HINDUISM TODAY



MEL BOYLE

COVER: (left) Iraivan Temple under construction in Hawaii; (above) Tom Hartley, center, Lord Mayor of Belfast, Northern Ireland, with organizers of the 2009 Festival of India, one manifestation of the growing and appreciated Hindu presence in the now peaceful country

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VIRODHIN, THE YEAR OF ADVERSITIES

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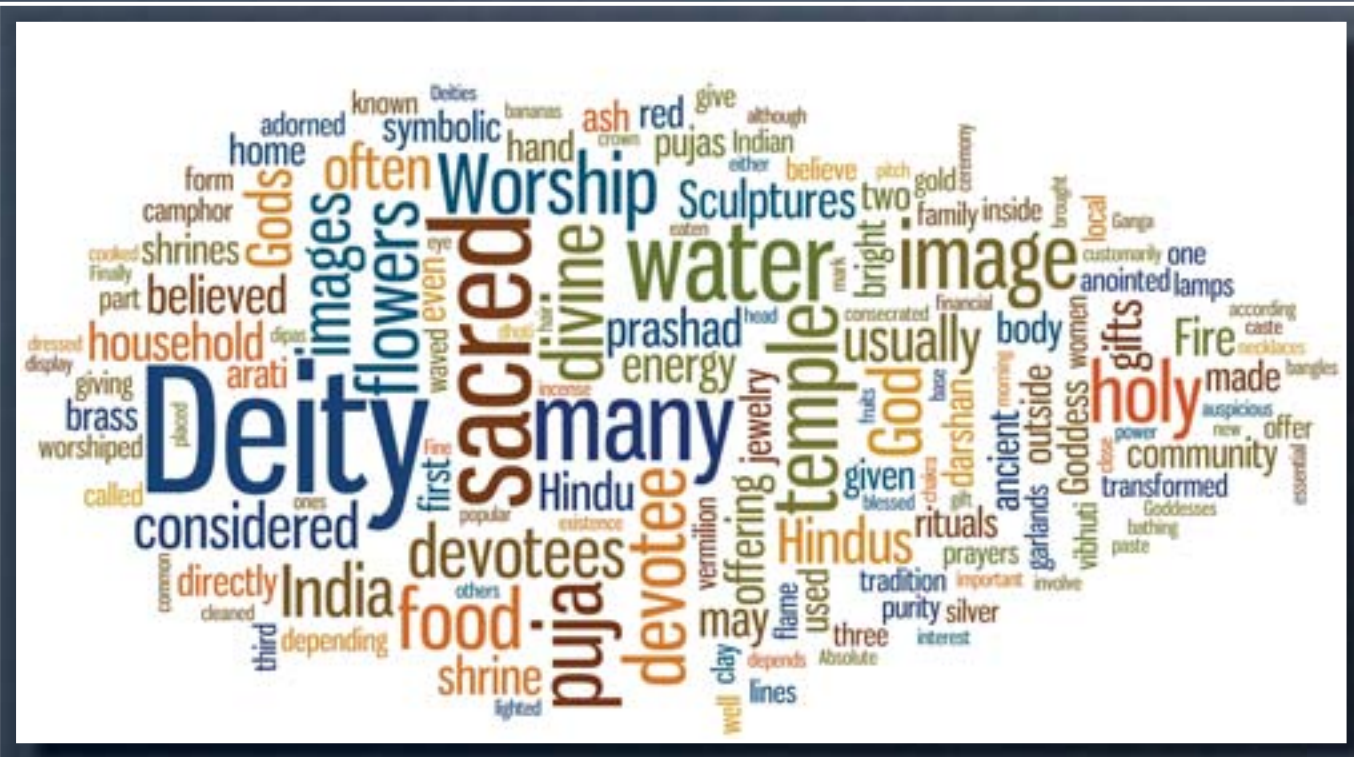
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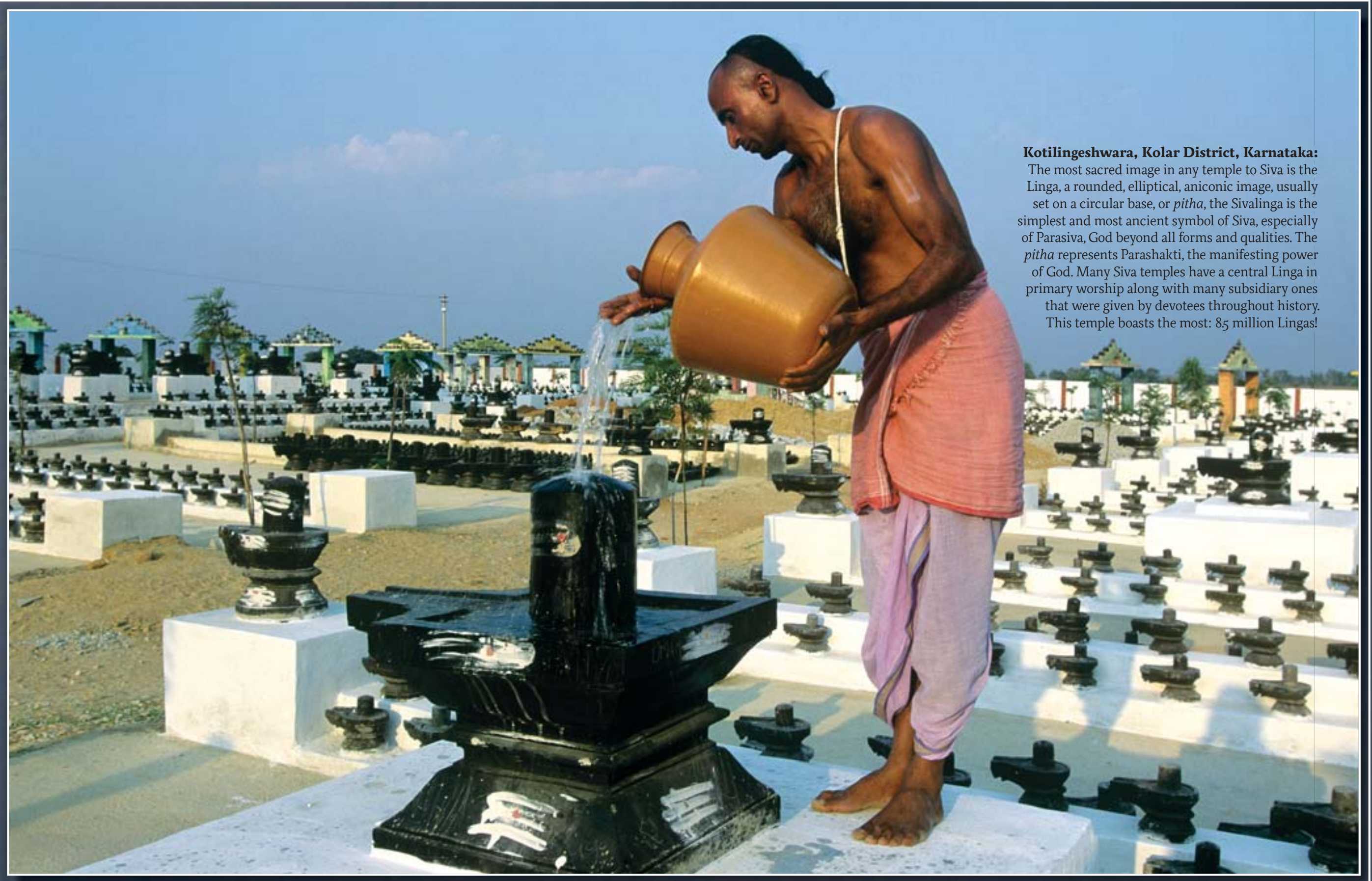


Elements of Hindu Devotion



The “word cloud” above was created from the text of our in-depth story on Hindu devotion; the size of each word reflects the relative number of times it appears in the text. This Educational Insight (see page 36) presents an endearing summary of Hindu ways of worship by Dr. Huyler, drawn from his book, *Meeting God, Elements of Hindu Devotion*, published by Yale University Press.

STEPHEN HUYLER



Kotilingeshwara, Kolar District, Karnataka:

The most sacred image in any temple to Siva is the Linga, a rounded, elliptical, aniconic image, usually set on a circular base, or *pitha*, the Sivalinga is the simplest and most ancient symbol of Siva, especially of Parasiva, God beyond all forms and qualities. The *pitha* represents Parashakti, the manifesting power of God. Many Siva temples have a central Linga in primary worship along with many subsidiary ones that were given by devotees throughout history. This temple boasts the most: 85 million Lingas!

Welcome

TO HINDUISM TODAY'S DIGITAL EDITION!

I am pleased to welcome you to the free digital edition of Hinduism Today magazine. It is the fulfillment of a vision held by my Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, to bring the magazine's profound Hindu teachings to the widest possible audience. The text of each issue has long been available on the Web, right back to 1979, but without the photographs and art. Now you have here the entire contents of the printed edition, with all photos and art. Plus, it is interactive—every link is live; click and you go to a web page. You can participate in the magazine in a number of ways, accessed through buttons on the right. And you can help support this free edition in two ways: make an online contribution (even a small one); patronize our specialized advertisers. Explore the resources here, enjoy our latest edition and e-mail us if you are inspired.

Bodhinatha Veylanswami

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S. Sambandha Sivacarya at the Indology Department's palm leaf manuscript library of the French Institute of Pondicherry

INDIA

Agama Scholar Honored

FOR OVER 50 YEARS, S. SAMBANDHA SIVACARYA HAS WORKED ten hours a day to collect, preserve and translate the *Saiva Agamas*. In February, 2009, the French government awarded him the "Ordre des Palmes Academiques" in recognition of his contributions to the study of the languages, texts, history and cultures of India. Established in 1808 by Napoleon Bonaparte, this is one of the world's oldest awards—and one of France's most prestigious.

Sambandha Sivacarya began extensively collecting and studying Saiva manuscripts in the 1950s under the guidance of Pandit N.R. Bhatt. Though born, raised and trained in a family of Adisaiva priests, he decided to forego the life of a temple priest in order to devote his life to saving the scriptures of his faith.

POP CULTURE

Reincarnated: "Superbrain Yoga"

MUCH TO THE AMUSEMENT of many Hindus, the ancient practice of crossing the arms to grasp the earlobes and squatting several times, known in Tamil as *thoppu karanam*, has emerged on the pop health scene. The renowned New Age

teacher of Pranic Healing, Master Choa Kok Sui [dates of life], co-opted the practice and copyrighted the label "Superbrain Yoga." A CBS piece on the exercise found its way onto YouTube, and now people are bobbing up and down all over the world.

Practitioners claim they have documented its positive effects on learning-disabled autistic children and depressed, forgetful adults. Most Hindus know this as an old form of discipline performed as an act of worship before Lord Ganesha. Although once again our cultural heritage has been openly pirated for profit, clinical validation is always good for the Hindu faith.



Inattentive boys sharpen up with a few rounds of thoppu karanam

GLOBAL DHARMA

AUSTRALIA

Vedas Are Thriving in Australia

THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF the Sydney Veda Patasala was celebrated at Scout Hall, North Carlingford, Sydney on April 5, 2009, with a unique Vedic chanting program. More

Gurukkal, Sri Ramarathinam and Sri Narayanan in preserving this ancient oral tradition and wisdom, declared by UNESCO to be a World Intangible Cultural Heritage. Mrs Akila Ramarathinam, Joint General Secretary of VHP, explained that the Sydney Veda Patasala is the first of its kind outside the Indian subcontinent. It encourages study by the whole family and is open to all, regardless of age, caste, creed, race or gender. Mr. Jonathan



Families learn to chant the Vedas in the Sydney Veda Patasalas which have, in just one year, grown to five schools with 100 students

than 150 people participated. The *patasala* (school), an initiative of Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) of Australia, started in 2008 in Baulkham Hills with ten students under the guidance of Swami Vigyananand, Joint General Secretary of the VHP. During the recent program, Swami acknowledged the selfless commitment of the teachers, Sri Subramanian, Sri Ravi

Nanlohy, Cultural Development Coordinator from Baulkham Hills Shire Council, praised the community. "I am impressed by the Hindu society's initiative and participation in this revival." He expressed amazement "in seeing entire families from grandparents to grandchildren learning together in an program undertaken without any government financial support."

SEYCHELLES

Hinduism Is Strong in Seychelles

FAR OFF THE EAST COAST OF Kenya, in the Indian Ocean, lies the spectacularly beautiful country of Seychelles, comprising 115 islands. Its small, ethnically diverse population of just 80,000, drawn from countries all over the world, includes South Indian Saivite Tamil Hindus; whose ancestors came as indentured laborers in the late 1700s, to join a 3500 worker community established by the French. It is a testimony to the steadfastness of the faith of these Hindus that two centuries later their religion and faith are not only strong, but flourishing and growing.

V. Sivasupramaniam reports

from Seychelles on this year's January festival for Lord Murugan. "Thaipoozam Kavadi Festival was started in the Seychelles Navasakthi Vinayagar temple in 1993—one year after the opening of the temple—on a modest scale in the inner courtyard of the temple. It has since grown in size to become a national festival. In 1998, the government declared *kavadi* day a holiday for the Hindus. It now involves not only many locals but also attracts globe-trotting tourists, who get an insight into our oriental cultural values.

He said, "The *kavadi* festival is a powerful assertion of Hindu individuality and a forceful expression of Hindu solidarity in a multi-racial and a multi-cultural country such as Seychelles. At the same time, this festival evidences our Tamil cultural roots and the relevance of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. It makes a proud statement of our common

membership in a great, rich and enduring Hindu civilization, a heritage shared by a wide diaspora that has reached across the globe."



(above) Ladies performing Thiruvilakku (lamp lighting) puja; (below) the quality of the festival has been enriched by the growing variety and number of kavadis carried as penance by devotees



The famed Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple of Madurai, dubbed "the Athens of India," is re-energized with a spectacular celebration

INDIA

Madurai's Wonder Renewed

AFTER FIFTEEN YEARS OF renovation, the re-consecration of the 2,000-year-old Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, was conducted from March 26 to April 9, 2009. Work (usually done every 12 years) began in 1994 and cost millions of rupees. Improvements included plating of Goddess Meenakshi's tower

with 30 kg of gold. The Mahakumbhabhishekam was conducted flawlessly, with the administration doing a superb job of crowd management. Thousands of devotees were blessed with the darshan of dozens of priests pouring the blessed waters over the temple's golden spires at 9.15 am on April 9.

MALAYSIA

Bujang Pre-dates Angkor Wat

MALAYSIAN ARCHEOLOGISTS announced that in February, 2009, they have made yet another discovery of ancient artifacts in the Northern State of Kedah. This area is the location of the Hindu civilization of Bujang, established by the Tamil king Rajendra Chola I, son of Rajaraja Chola. Inscriptions in Tanjore, Tamil Nadu, dating back to 1030CE mention his dominion over lands in Southeast Asia. But the recent discovery indicates that the civilization was there seven centuries earlier. Archaeological team leader professor Mokhtar Saidi said buildings found at the site indicate it was part of Bujang. "We have dated artifacts from what we believe are an administration building and an iron smelter to 1,700 years ago (250CE), which sets the Bujang civilization between the third and fourth century." The



Pedestals for Sivalingams from the ancient Hindu society of Bujang, Kedah, North Malaysia

presence of the iron smelter, he said, shows that the civilization was advanced technologically, though it predated the Angkor civilization by 900 years.



INDIA

Gangeshwar by the Sea

ACCORDING TO THE MAHABHARATA, during their arduous exile, the Pandavas came to a serene hamlet called Fudam, tucked away on the picturesque island of Mani Nagar, now known as Diu, off the coast of present-day Gujarat. There they pledged to fast until they had properly worshiped Lord Siva. Unable to find a Sivalinga in the vicinity, the five brothers established their own five lingas in a cave by the roaring sea, each according to his height. The five lingas represent the Pandavas, the largest one installed by

Yudhishtira and the smallest by Nakul. Only after performing puja to the Sivalingas did the brothers take their meal.

That was around 5,000 years ago, when the sea was 100 meters away from the cave. With the passage of time, sea levels have risen. Today its waves lash and wash the Sivalingas amid the seafront crags, as if offering obeisance to the Lord. At high tide, the lingas are completely submerged.

The Pandavas stayed here for about a month, living in the jungle. Later, yogis and munis found the Sivalingas and cared for them. A temple came into being some 600 years ago. Mur-tis of Lord Siva's consort, Goddess Parvati, and Lord Ganesha were installed in the shrine. Under the statues one sees Brahmi script, no longer legible today. There used to be a stone idol of Lord Hanuman on the north side of the temple, but that area is now submerged by the sea. The steps down into the sanctum of five lingas are quite steep. These were made during the Solanki age, 1,000 years ago.

Southwest of the cave is a spring where sweet water gushes out at low tide. Swami Nirmalji, one of the priests at the temple, shared, "We believe it



This ancient seaside Siva shrine of on the island of Diu, in the state of Gujarat, is slowly being inundated by the rising sea.

is the holy Ganga jal. It is sweet even though mixed with sea water. This is why we call this Gangeshwar Temple."

Swami Nirmalji says there is an intrinsic power in the Gangeshwar shrine and that worship of its five Sivalingas makes your wishes come true. And the temple holds some mysteries, according to the locals. For example no one has ever been able stay in the temple the whole night. Anyone who dares is found in an unconscious state the next morning. Many who have ventured there after dark reported seeing a man with long hair and flowing beard. And every night, at the stroke of 12, the mysterious toll of the bells and conch resonate far and wide. Rushing to find out who is there,

one will find no one. A huge snake appears frequently, curling around the Sivalingas in the wee hours of morning. Those who see it are thought to be very fortunate. Known as the "wonder snake," locals say it spreads out, circles the Sivalingas and then vanishes into the sea, leaving behind an marvelous fragrance.

On Mahasivaratri each year a big fair is organized her, and a festive fervor fills the air when. Doves of devotees come to the wish-fulfilling temple, where the Lord makes His presence felt in every wave that touches the Sivalingas, every breeze that kisses the sea and every bird that chirps in the ambience laden with an undefinable spiritual zeal.

TIRTHO BANNERJEE
LUCKNOW, UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA

BRIEFLY...

PRESIDENT OBAMA'S ADVISORY Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships was formed to advise the president on faith-based and other key issues, such as fatherhood and poverty. Among those chosen as members is Anju Bhargava, a Hindu, founder of Asian Indian Women of America.

IN MARCH, 2009, OVER 6,000 devotees participated in a protest march and rally in Tamil Nadu, demanding that the gov-

ernment return the control of Chidambaram Temple to the Dikshitar community, who have managed the temple since time immemorial.

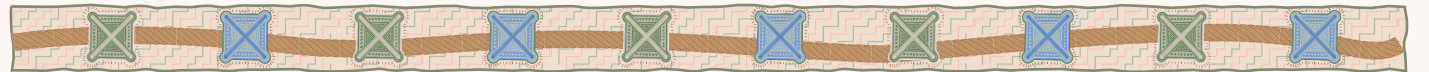
A SECULAR ORGANIZATION IN Britain is producing "certificates of de-baptism" for people wishing to renounce their Christian faith. The National Secular Society (NSS) says more than 100,000 ex-worshippers have downloaded the de-baptism certificates from its website,

and that thousands of others have ordered parchment versions at about \$4 a copy. The NSS advertisement says: "Liberate yourself from the Mumbo-Jumbo that liberated you from the Original Sin you never had."

UK HINDUS DISAGREE ABOUT the initiative of Davender Kumar Ghai, 70, to have Britain honor his religious rights by repealing a 1903 act banning open-air cremations so that Hindus could use traditional funeral pyres. Jai Lakhani said: "The idea that the soul requires an open-air cremation in order to be released demolishes the

potency of the soul and thereby undermines the very foundation of Hinduism." Others argue that the Hindu traditional method deserves a fair hearing.

A GROUP OF HINDUS IN NEPAL took action in March to protest the government's neglect of the Kumari palace temple. After yet another attempt by looters to steal decorative temple panels, the group blocked tourists from entering the palace and kept the Kumari from appearing at the palace window. They hope to convince the government to use tourist fees for renovation and security.



HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927-2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects

and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred Vedas and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this seva by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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IN MY OPINION

Pleading for Accurate Portrayal

A factual description of India and Hinduism in American school textbooks is achievable, if we act

BY FAREN RAJKUMAR

AS A PROUD HINDU American living in an ethnically diverse country, I enjoy explaining my great religion to friends, their families, visitors to my temple and anyone who shows curiosity about Hinduism. Our beautiful and resonant prayers, festive holidays, fascinating symbolism and, of course, the music, delicious food and traditional clothing seem to increase in popularity in America every year, and I am always more than happy to assist people in obtaining a clearer, more concise understanding of them.

However, I have encountered a major obstacle in my path to spreading awareness and appreciation of Hinduism. This obstacle is the American education system, which presents a very inaccurate and demeaning impression of India, Hinduism and their rich and diverse histories. India, according to the textbooks, is the land where cows are permitted to roam the streets freely and people of low income are forced to assume the duties of a Dalit as part of the degrading caste system. Hinduism is a religion brought to India by the "enlightened Aryans," a religion in which the forehead dot is a must for married women.

But what about the essentials of Hindu religion that Hindus would recognize? Misrepresentations like these are typical, because the textbook authors have little to no personal experience of Hinduism—and the professionals and scholars they consult seldom include a practicing Hindu.

It seems that the American education system is bent on delivering a colorful, near-savage and eccentric portrayal of Hinduism to students rather than the facts. The real essence of Hinduism may be more than the average student can absorb in one lesson, but a fact-based lesson on India's ancient development or a clear definition of the Hindu concept of God would not permanently damage a publisher's reputation. After all, isn't the goal of the



school system to prepare children for the real world? In the real world, a well-informed Hindu would never agree that Sanskrit was a gift to the Dravidian people of India from the Aryans, so why should students be told that this is the truth? I encounter misrepresentations like this frequently and often find myself in uncomfortable situations at school. When

a teacher delivers a misleading message to my class about Hinduism, I feel the urge to deny it and correctly inform my peers. However, the adult with the degree has the authority in the classroom, and some teachers feel offended if corrected by a student. To prevent conflict with my teacher, and protect my school record, I simply keep my mouth shut.

I do see hope in organizations such as the Hindu American Foundation. Its relentless efforts to correct misrepresentations and inaccuracies in textbooks are a great comfort to me and all Hindus in America. With an increase in terrorism in the Middle East, it is crucial that people do not confuse Muslim extremists with Sikhs and Brahmins, and Arabic with Sanskrit. Though our religion is all-encompassing, it is distinct and extraordinary in many ways, and it is essential that students grasp its facets clearly and correctly.

A better understanding of anything leads to a greater appreciation of it, and America's understanding of Hinduism begins with what children are taught in school. It is the responsibility of Hindu youths living here to correct the inaccuracies pronounced by Western textbooks. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." If we desire truthful representation in America, then it becomes our responsibility to make it happen.

FAREN RAJKUMAR, 15, is a freshman at Plantation Sr. High School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. E-mail: arcane99@bellsouth.net



Our Three Kinds of Temples

The community temple, the home shrine and the sanctuary inside you are readily available to stabilize and uplift your daily life

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

IT WOULD BE HARD TO OVERESTIMATE THE POWER AND importance of the temple in Hindu culture and spiritual practice—the home of God to which we go for solace and connection with the divine. When we think of temples, we naturally think of community temples, those always welcoming, often ornate, magical spaces which I like to call *pura mandiras*. Worshiping in these temples is a central practice in Hinduism. But there is a broader, seldom discussed understanding of the temple in Sanatana Dharma which embraces two other sacred places of communion as equally important. One is the home shrine, or *griha mandira*, and the other is the soul temple or *atma mandira*.

The Community Temple, Pura Mandira

Hindu communities revolve around the local temple, which serves as the hub of culture, worship, festivals and more. For the devout, the ideal is to attend a puja at the community temple daily, or at least once a week, and to participate in the major holy festivals celebrated within its precincts. This allows us to experience the blessings of God and the Gods regularly and to enjoy frequent fellowship with other devotees, which is uplifting and engaging. Though God is everywhere, it is easiest to receive His blessings at the temple. My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, had many insights into temple mysticism: the ray of the temple, its subtle force field and how the three worlds work together in that sacred space. All this was apparent to his inner sight. He wrote, "If you could view the temple from the inner worlds, you would see a brilliant ray coming from the Third World, or world of the Gods, right into the temple on the physical plane. This ray allows communication similar to a live video conference. The priest opens the connection by performing puja. When the puja is performed with loving devotion, the ray becomes strong and inner doors open from God's world to ours; the angelic helpers, called devas, hover around and through the temple, and blessings pour out to the devotees. A Hindu temple's devonic rays have the power to transform the course of karma, open inner doors to new opportunities, assuage long-held hurts and provide inner visions equaling the fullness of devotion."

Regular worship at the community temple deepens our humility and our devotion to God. It also purifies and lifts our energy into higher chakras. In addition to worship, we can also perform service (*seva*, or karma yoga) at the temple and accrue even more spiritual benefits. The *Tirumantiram*, an ancient scripture by Rishi Tirumular lists a number of traditional chores in verse 109: "The simple temple duties, lighting the lamps, picking flowers, lovingly polishing the floors, sweeping, singing the Lord's praise, ringing the bell and fetching ceremonial water—these constitute the *dasa marga* (path of the servant)." Additionally, those who are qualified can volunteer to



teach Hinduism to the youth.

If you are finding fulfillment by worshiping in your community temple, don't stop there. Consider extending your devotional life to the *griha mandira*, or home shrine.

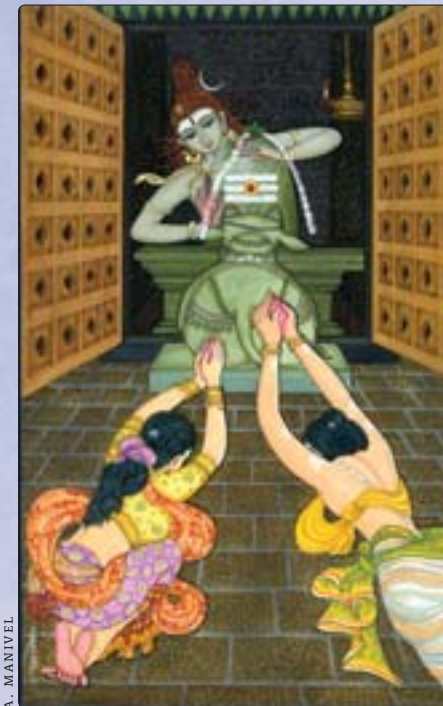
The Home Shrine, Griha Mandira

The ideal Hindu home centers around the home shrine, a special room set aside and maintained to create a temple-like atmosphere which holds us close to our spiritual goals and practices. In this holy space we conduct puja, read scripture, perform *sadhana*, sing bhajana and do japa. Here we can always feel the presence of God and the Gods, whom we honor especially in the morning and evening and before meals, which we offer to them before we partake. Here worship traditionally begins before dawn, with the simple act of dedication for the coming day. After a bath, morning puja is performed, usually by the husband. The wife and older children may also perform their own puja at another time of day. The form of home worship, called *atmartha puja*, is simple: we lovingly invoke the Deities, tender choice offerings and beseech their blessings for our family and the world. This early morning worship begins the day on a religious note, blessing the work and activities that follow. Evening devotionals include a simple arati, bhajana, meditation and reading of scripture—a day's-end routine that carries family members to lofty, celestial realms during sleep. The temple-like atmosphere of the shrine room can prevail throughout the home if family members handle disagreements and difficult issues in a harmonious, professional way, avoiding arguments and expressions of anger.

You can bring some of the power of the community temple into your home shrine by lighting an oil lamp when you return from the temple. This sacred act brings devas who were at the temple into the home shrine room, where, from the inner world, they can bless all family members and strengthen the religious force field of the home. This is one of my guru's unique insights into the mysticism of temple worship.

How elaborate should the home puja be? It can vary from short and simple to long and complex. Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Mahaswamiji (1894–1994) of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham commented, "Every family must perform puja to Ishvara. Those who find it convenient to do so may conduct elaborate types of puja after receiving proper initiation into them. Others need perform only a brief puja, not lasting more than ten minutes or so. Office-goers must offer at least this brief worship. The sacred bell must ring in every home."

Ideally, all members of the family gather together in the shrine room for a puja each morning. Additionally, visiting the shrine at



A. MANIVEL



other key times brings special benefits. Visiting the shrine before leaving the home reminds you that work is also worship when approached in a spiritual way, a strategic attitude that helps you maintain a religious perspective during your time out of the home. Visiting the shrine upon returning home provides a few moments to release any negative, worldly vibrations you have taken on while away. Visiting before an important event, such as a job interview or a major exam at school, you can pray for special blessings and guidance. Retreating to this oasis when emotionally disturbed or reflecting on a personal problem reminds you to spiritually center yourself and overcome the challenge or upset condition with the blessings of God and the Gods. These are several ways the home shrine can benefit the family. By your example you teach these practices to your children—practices that will sustain them as they make their passage through life.

Performing your own individual puja in the home shrine with sincerity and regularity unfolds a relationship with the Divine that is likened to that of a child to a parent, called *satputra marga*, or "path of the dutiful child." The *Tirumantiram* summarizes, "Puja, reading the scriptures, singing hymns, performing japa and unsullied austerity, truthfulness, restraint of envy and offering of food—these and other self-purifying acts constitute the flawless *satputra marga*" (verse 1496).

If you are finding fulfillment by worshiping in the home shrine, don't stop there. Consider worshiping in the *atma mandira*, if you are not already practicing yoga meditation.

The Soul Temple, Atma Mandira

The third place of worship is the temple within the body, which I call the *atma mandira*. My paramaguru, Yogaswami of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, said, "God lives in this house built of earth, water, fire, air and ether. Therefore, keep the house clean and the mind pure, and conduct yourself with calmness." His disciple Markanduswami recounted his guru's instructions: "Yogaswami said, 'Leave your relations downstairs, your will, your intellect, your senses. Leave the fellows and go upstairs by yourself and find out who you are. Then you can go downstairs and be with the fellows.'"

Yogaswami was describing the internal form of worship—medita-

Three modes of communion: (left to right) A man and woman prostrate to God in their local temple; a husband and wife perform japa, reciting the Lord's name together in their home shrine room; a yogi in meditation communes with God inside himself.

tion in the sacred chamber of the soul, wherein we quiet our physical body, still our astral and mental bodies, become centered in our immortal, spiritual body of light, and strive for, discover, near and ultimately merge with God within. Through meditation, we temporarily set aside our mundane concerns and experience our refined, spiritual nature that is always serene and centered, the source of intuition, solace and strength for all our activities. Consistent practice of meditation has the power to increase our concentration, observation, understanding, compassion, appreciation, cooperation, mental acuity, emotional stability, willpower and our ability to see God in all things and all people.

Awakening Wisdom

God abides in all three of these temples. In the community temple He is worshiped in elaborate, formal ways, mystical ways that bring His shakti, or power, into the inner chamber to bless the world. In the home shrine He is worshiped in simple, loving ways which bring His presence into the home to guide the family through karma's sometimes difficult passages and bless their pursuits. In the chamber of the heart He is worshiped as the Life of life, as the Self of ourself, to awaken peace of mind, insight, inspiration and enlightenment. The three temples stand as a central pillar of Hindu life.

Successful worship in the three temples over many lifetimes culminates in *jnana*, divine wisdom, which we see in an enlightened being, a soul in its maturity, immersed in the blessed realization of God, while living out earthly karma. In verse 1444 of the ancient yogic text *Tirumantiram*, Rishi Tirumular sums up our thoughts: "Being the Life of life is splendid *jnana* worship [achieving *jnana*]. Beholding the Light of life is great yoga worship [meditation]. Giving life by invocation is external worship [performing puja]. Expressing adoration is *charya* [attending puja]." As you see, our experience of the three temples of Hinduism is an ancient one that survives in the 21st century.



LETTERS

Great Hindu of the Year

I would like to send you our deepest appreciation for HINDUISM TODAY, a magazine par excellence in all respects. Great job. Carry on; it's a wonderful service, a service touching the points needed by spiritual seekers. In the Jan/Feb/Mar 2009 issue, you selected Swami Avdheshananda as the Hindu of the Year. A master in all respects, Swamiji truly deserves this honor. We would like to send our congratulations to him as an excellent yogi and to you for making a fine selection. All of us at the Omkarananda Ashram know him; he visited and put his holy feet in our Omkar-ananda Saraswati Nilayam Inter College. The comments about Swami Avdheshananda are excellent and show clearly that he is in all respects a leading spiritual personality. To him and to his mission, our deepest adoration.

SWAMI VISHVESHWARANANDA
RISHIKESH, UTTARAKHAND, INDIA

Hinduism Today Turns 30

I was pleasantly reminded through the Jan/Feb/Mar 2009 issue that our wonderful magazine has reached its thirtieth birthday. I am particularly happy and proud that I started reading HINDUISM TODAY from its first issue in 1979. At that time, it was a simple black-and-white newspaper. Today, after thirty long years, HINDUISM TODAY has improved by leaps and bounds. Because it has a large readership circulation and the articles are so well researched, it is valued and read by Hindus and non-Hindus alike. As for me, HINDUISM TODAY has made me a better Hindu and a better man. It has made me become a vegetarian and a karma yogi. I wish HINDUISM TODAY a very happy birthday and many, many more birthdays to come. Thanks to the editors and all the staff who make this magazine tick.

K. THURUVAN
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Cremation Is Cremation

In response to Jay Lakhani's article, "Open-Air Cremations in Britain" (Hindu Press International, Mar 28, 2009), I want to say, with utmost humility, that we may be missing the woods for the trees. My personal experience in America has been that people take Hinduism for granted. (I am still deeply offended when people gift me items made of calf leather!) The last time such a strong position was taken was when Taco Bell was sued for serving beef. Both in politics and business, there is nothing like a lawsuit to make everyone sit up and take notice. Ahimsa is certainly a hallmark of Hinduism, but many times one is mistaken for being a pushover. To give you an example, it is the tradition of married

Hindu women to pierce their noses. So when a friend of mine got hers done, her boss told her that as long as the ring is small she did not have a problem with it. My friend did not have any intention of sporting a large nose ring anyway, but was offended by the presumptuousness of her boss's statement. We wondered how her boss would have reacted if my friend had told her she could wear a cross as long as it wasn't too big.

Even if open air cremation is permitted in Britain, most Hindus there would probably still prefer regular cremation. But by bringing the issue to the forefront, it is focusing attention on the fact that Hinduism, like all religions, has certain special requirements, and society needs to be tolerant of that. After all, when the British ruled our Hindu nation for 200 years, did we not make allowances for their steak dinners and open consorting?

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The soul has a lot of attachment to the body and its possessions during life. After death, we release the soul from these attachments by burning the body and giving away possessions as alms to the needy. This helps the soul move on. No matter what kind of crematorium the body is burned in, the end result is the same. If this is understood, there will be no need for debate. It is not necessary to be fanatical about such a procedure. Scriptures give alternate ways to go about many practices, provided the *bhava*, feeling, is maintained.

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Don't Hate "The Love Guru"

It has been many months since the release of Mike Myers's "The Love Guru" and its subsequent criticism in HINDUISM TODAY ("Vulgar Film Incites Hindu Censure," Diaspora, Oct/Nov/Dec, 2008). Being a Hindu convert, it has taken me some time to summon the courage to voice my support for the movie and its writer. To begin, I have a high regard for Myers as a comic writer and as an actor. I believe the comedian—as much as the poet, artist or philosopher—serves an essential function in every society, pointing out our faults and fallacies, preventing us from taking ourselves too seriously. That said, I also confess to possessing an occasionally juvenile sense of humor, to which Myers often appeals. However, if it were only the puerile potty humor, I wouldn't give his work a moment's notice. But his work has subtleties of expression and quirks of social commentary that add a redeeming dimension. "The Love

Guru" fits that model: plenty of bathroom and bedroom jokes but also a nuanced commentary on neo-Eastern, pseudo-spiritual, self-proclaimed, self-help gurus and the curiously American fascination therewith.

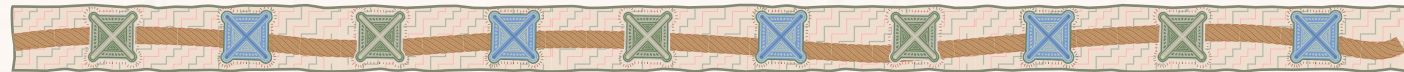
I advise caution against taking ourselves too seriously, and vulgarity is an excellent cure for this. Let's be honest: while human form and sexuality can be sacred, the human body and its many functions are purely ridiculous. Laughter is good for us. And from a scriptural perspective, it should be remembered that even our dear Lord Siva manifests many counter-cultural impulses that cause the most pious to raise eyebrows. When assessing the madman dancing through graveyards, who was right: Daksha or Sati?

Most importantly, though, I am wary of condemning an artistic endeavor on religious grounds, especially before it has even been seen (as happened in these pages last summer). Honor to Lord Siva and all the devas, yes, but I reject the idea that our religion is too sacred for jest. Will we next be torching cinemas as much as issuing death threats to artists or their publishers? Is this the hyper-piety to which we aspire? Are our Gods and our dharma so delicate that they cannot withstand levity? Are we so insecure in our beliefs that we cannot laugh at ourselves? To paraphrase "The Love Guru:" if Gandhi, Einstein and Shakespeare were talking and they saw two elephants mating, even they would laugh. So please, friends, in all of life be slow to condemn, fair in forgiveness and always quick to smile.

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Slumdog Millionaire, So What?

In response to *The Wall Street Journal's* article, "Slumdog: A Legacy Not to Be Envied" (Hindu Press International, Apr 5, 2009), it's only a piece of fiction, and the film does not portray India or Hinduism in any negative way. The entire film was shot in India, on location in the Mumbai slums and surrounding countryside. It used India as the backdrop for the storyline. It is a reality that there are huge slums, children are kidnapped and forced into prostitution and beggary, there is corruption and Hindus and Muslims have had riots where both sides have murdered the other. The film does not make a judgment on India; that judgment seems to be happening by Indians themselves. This film is no more a negative portrayal of India than American films, such as *The Departed*, are a negative portrayal of America. Indians, Hindus especially, sometimes become reactive and oversensitive about the reality of Indian society. If



Hindus are concerned about the subjective image of Hinduism worldwide, then they should be actively working to counteract genuine misinformation, rather than complaining about a fictional piece of filmmaking. The California textbook issue is a good example. Hinduism was misrepresented and given a negative slant, and Hindus, American and Indian, came together to make a positive change. If Hindus are concerned about negative or sensational journalistic portrayals of Hinduism, they should get active in journalism that gives all points of view instead of focusing on the sensational. They should also become active in promoting and writing for HINDUISM TODAY, which has probably done more to show the world what Hinduism is really like than any other journalistic source.

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Bane of Zoo-Bound Elephants

In "Toronto Rights Growing" (Global Dharma, Jan/Feb/Mar, 2009), you describe the annual chariot festival of Toronto's Sri Varasithi Vinaayagar Temple, including that the procession included an elephant from the local zoo. In the wonderful Publisher's Desk article, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami explains how HINDUISM TODAY has moved forward in the past thirty years to become a glorious, global voice for Hinduism. Perhaps it is also time for Hinduism itself to move forward into the 21st century and to recognize that elephants and other animals are not meant

for human exploitation. It is only by refusing to support exploitive facilities like zoos and commercial businesses that these practices, including the barbaric capture of baby elephants from their loving mothers and herds, will end. I realize that many Indian temples have elephants. I am not addressing elephant care and maintenance in India. I am focusing solely on the plight of elephants in North American zoos, specifically American and Canadian zoos, which are governed by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

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Tolerating Conversion in India

I don't understand why the government of India tolerates any form of organized religious proselytizing anywhere within the frontiers of India. Given the nature of India and her history, the fact that Hinduism is not a religion that seeks to convert others, the fact that Hinduism, in addition to being a network of closely related spiritual philosophies based on the *Vedas*, is also a 5000+ year-old culture which is the very fabric of Indian civilization, why do the people of India allow their government to either tacitly or overtly support the destruction of the very foundations upon which India is built? I am not advocating the suppression of other religions within India, like how non-Islamic faiths are treated in Muslim countries. But if well financed Hindu organizations started going into Canadian or US towns aggres-

sively proselytizing to the point of creating communal disturbances and violence, there would be a huge outcry. The governments of Canada and the US would find a way to shut down the proselytizers and their organizations. They would have no choice; otherwise there would be an outbreak of real violence and societal breakdown, which is something no democracy can allow.

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Tilak on Their Forehead

Tilak is a mark of auspiciousness. It is a unique sign for Hindus, which you have reported on several times. I saw the feature story "Meet the Young Hindu American Foundation" (Apr/May/Jun, 2009). I appreciate seeing that young Hindu ladies wear the bindi on their forehead at least during religious events and conferences to show their identity.

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or e-mailed to: letters@hindu.org

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

Creating Self-Confident Tiny Tots

Help provide tools for teaching dharma to children

ONE DAY, WHEN SHE WAS FOUR years old, Anya brought her Ganesha to preschool and her little friend exclaimed, "God doesn't look like *that*!" She answered, "Yes, He does. God has many faces." Four years old!

More recently, little Ravi, also four years old at the time, was told by a preschool mate that if he held "wrong beliefs," he would go to Hell. Ravi responded, "Oh no, God lives in our hearts." Mrs. Lila Mehta tells these stories not only because she is Anya's and Ravi's naturally proud grandmother and teacher of Hinduism, but also because the stories show how much self-assurance Hindu teachings can confer to even a small child. "Oh," she adds, "and little children are the best of students; they absorb so well."



God lives in our hearts: (left) *The Mehtas with Hinduism Today's founder, Gurudeva, in 2001;* (right) *with their grandchildren Arjun, Ravi and Anya today*

Lila and her husband, Dr. Arun J. Mehta, live in Vancouver, Canada, and are retired; she was a school teacher and he a physician. They came from India in 1966 and have, ever since, worked as a team to teach Hinduism to the children of the community, their own children and now their grandchildren. And, yes, HINDUISM TODAY has been a part of the team—from the first issues back in 1980.

All along, the Mehtas gleaned from materials for their classes, especially from the wisdom-rich center sections. "It's given us so much clarity, answers to our questions and formulas to explain the teachings," says Mrs. Mehta.

The Mehtas donate to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. "The magazine is rare among the media today," explains Dr. Mehta. "It presents Hinduism in a positive light, and it keeps the teachings pure against so many forces today that seek to dilute it. This is the highest dharma. I am convinced it is our philosophy alone that can save this world." Please consider donating to the Hinduism Today Production Fund so that we may continue to provide teaching and learning tools to the grandparents and grandchildren of the world. Learn more about the Production Fund at www.hheonline.org/productionfund/ and ask to receive our Production Fund e-newsletter at www.gurudeva.org/email-news.

QUOTES & QUIPS

Education is the manifestation of a perfection present in every person.

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), disciple of Sri Ramakrishna

Experience has taught me that silence is part of the spiritual discipline of a votary of truth. Proneness to exaggerate, to suppress or modify the truth, wittingly or unwittingly, is a natural weakness of man and silence is necessary in order to surmount it. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869–1948), *Indian spiritual leader*

To enter into the spiritual life is a rare blessedness, it is a great good: to take it seriously and engage in active spiritual Sadhana is a second blessedness and a still greater good: but to persevere in the spiritual life, to be ever progressive and ceaseless in one's spiritual life, is the greatest good, the crowning blessedness **Swami Chidananda** (1916–2008), *President of the Divine Life Society*

Stop all your attachments to false values. In an ever-changing world there is nothing worthwhile for us to desire or weep for. Joys and sorrows are bound to come in human life; they are just two sides of the same coin. **Swami Chinmayananda** (1916–1992), *founder of the Chinmaya Mission*

I have heard that man can acquire superhuman powers through it and perform miracles. What shall I do with superhuman powers? Can one realize God through them? If God is not realized then everything becomes false. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836–1886)

The happiness of one's own heart alone cannot satisfy the soul; one must include, as necessary to one's own happiness, the

happiness of others. When you learn to live for others, they will live for you. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893–1952), *Founder of Self-Realization Fellowship*

Practice makes everything easier—except getting up in the morning. *Anonymous*

About many things in Hinduism I had once been inclined to believe that there was much of dream in it, much that was delusion and maya. But now day after day I realized in the mind, I realized in the heart, I realized in the body the truths of the Hindu religion. They became living experiences to me, and things were opened to me which no material science could explain. **Sri Aurobindo** (1879–1950)

Of wit, money and virtue, believe one-fourth part of what you hear men say. *Anonymous*

With love enshrined in the heart, one truly lives. Without it, the body is but bones encased in skin. **Tirukural** 80

The best way to predict the future is to invent it. *Anonymous*

Some people think they are worth a lot of money just because they have it. **Fannie Hurst** (1889–1968), *American novelist*

From Persia to the Chinese Sea, from the icy regions of Siberia to the islands of Java and Borneo, from Oceania to Africa, India has propagated her beliefs, her tales and her civilization. She has left indelible imprints on one-fourth of the human race in the course of a long succession of centuries. She now has the right to reclaim in universal history the rank that ignorance has refused her for a long time and to hold her place amongst the great nations summarizing and symbolizing the spirit of Humanity. **Sylvain Levi** (1863–1935), *French scholar*

through the spine up to the crown of the head. Through yoga, the *kundalini* energy is awakened and made to rise up the *sushumna* to the top of the head.



A. MANIVEL

DID YOU KNOW?

Our Masculine and Feminine Energies

MODERN PSYCHOLOGY STUDIES the presence of masculine and feminine sides in everyone, regardless of the person's physical gender. Hinduism endorses of the reality of this view, speaking of dual energy currents within our subtle body. These are called *ida* and *pingala*.

The *ida* current is feminine and the channel of physical-emotional energy. When energy is flowing through *ida*, we are more conscious of the physical body. We are not in the world of thought but in the world of feeling. We feel strongly and experience strong emotions.

The *pingala* current is masculine and the channel of intellectual-mental energy. When energy is flowing through the *pingala*, we are inquisitive and aware. We tend to reason and to argue.

In the center of the two stands the neutral *sushumna* current, rising

Frank and Ernest



Fear less, hope more; whine less, breathe more; talk less, say more; hate less, love more; and all good things are yours. *Swedish proverb*

Do what you should, not what you can. *Anonymous*

How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and the strong, because someday in life you will have

been all of these. **George Washington Carver** (1864–1943), *American scientist, botanist, educator and inventor*

The light which shines above heaven, above all the worlds, above everything, that is the same light which is within man. We can perceive it as the warmth in the body. And of it we have this audible proof: when we thus hear, by covering the ears, what is like the rumbling of a carriage, or the bellowing of an ox, or the sound of a blazing fire. One should worship as

Brahman that inner light which is seen and heard. He who knows it becomes distinct. **Chandogya Upanishad XIII.8**

Devout Hindus meet a satguru and in seeing him, draw the darshan vibration from him, absorbing it into themselves. When we say someone is holy or saintly we are feeling the radiations of that divine energy flooding through him and out into the whole world. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

BASICS OF HINDUISM

Chakras, Centers of Consciousness

HUMANS HAVE FOURTEEN GREAT nerve centers in the physical body, in the astral body and in the body of the soul. These centers are called chakras in Sanskrit, which means "wheel." These spinning vortices of energy are actually regions of mind power, each one governing certain aspects of our inner being. Together, they are the subtle components of all people.

When inwardly perceived, they are vividly colorful and can be heard by sages and mystics. When awareness flows through any one or more of these regions, the various functions of consciousness operate, such as memory, reason and willpower. In any one lifetime, one may predominantly be aware in two or three centers, thus setting the pattern for the way one thinks and lives. One develops a comprehension of these seven regions in a natural sequence, the perfection of one leading logically to the next. Thus, though we may not psychically be seeing

spinning forces within ourself, we nevertheless mature through memory, reason, willpower, cognition, universal love, divine sight and spiritual illumination.

There are six chakras above the *mula-dhara*, which is located at the base of the spine. When awareness is flowing through these chakras, consciousness is in the higher nature. There are also seven chakras below the *muladhara*, and when awareness is flowing through them, consciousness is in the lower nature.

Through personal sadhana, prayer, meditation, right thought, speech and action and love of God, we lift our own consciousness and that of others into the chakras above the *muladhara*, bringing the mind into the higher nature. The functions of the chakras are aspects of our being that we use every day. In the same way, we use our arms and hands everyday without thinking. The chakras do not awaken—they are already awakened in everyone.



I. WAYAN MARYA

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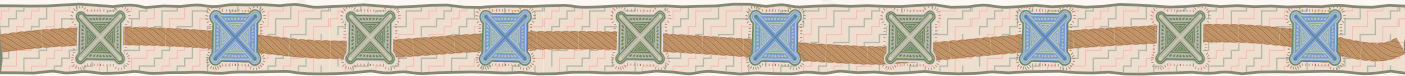
Responses to Lesson 1

We agree to promote within the US school system the
[history lesson] published by *Hinduism Today*... and to
enhance the dissemination of it. —**Resolution 3**
Hindu Mandir Executives Conference, Aug. 12, 2007

...correct, authentic and definitely better than I have
seen in any school textbook. —**Shiva G. Bajpai**, Ph.D
Director, Center for Asian Studies, California State University

I wholeheartedly and unequivocally recommend its use
in all official textbooks.
—**Swami Chidanand Saraswati**,
Founder-Chairman, India Heritage
Research Foundation, Rishikesh

I could imagine myself
recommending this lesson for my
college students. —**Jeffery D. Long**,
Ph.D, Chair, Department of Religious
Studies, Elizabethtown College, PA, USA



FROM THE AGAMAS

Yoga and the Path to God Realization

Before Patanjali, the *Saiva Agamas* explained attainment of the inner realms

Kirana Agama is one of the 28 Saiva Agamas. This
excerpt is from verses 12 to 77 of the section on
yoga from the unpublished translation by Dr. S. P.
Sabharathnam. It describes meditating upon the
chakras, the associated nadis or nerve currents,
and planes of realization sought. According to Dr.
Sabharathnam, these instructions on yoga in the
Agamas are the source of Pantanjali’s Yoga Aphorisms.

HAVING ASSUMED A RECOMMENDED POSTURE,
he should keep the joined palms just below his na-
vel and should hold a straight posture. Keeping his
mind on the heart-lotus, he should keep himself
detached from the external objects and senses. He should
remain in this state of restraint so long as he is in the yogic
practice. This kind of retention of mind is known as *pra-
tyahara*. One should then do the three phrases of breath
control, pranayama, three times before the commencement
of the yogic process. Through the practice of *pratyahara*
and pranayama, one can free himself from the tumults of
impeding causes arising out of external objects and thereby
become an accomplished yogin.

[Having achieved a state of dhyana, contemplation] he
mentally rises above the plane of heart-lotus to reach a
place belonging to Vishnu where there are sixteen *nadis*,
nerve currents, occupying the region of the ears. Above the
plane of this second lotus, there is a lotus region which is
very pure. This is in the region occupied by the palate. There
are 24 *nadis* running around the lotus petals. Rudra is to be
contemplated upon as being surrounded by these 24 *nadis*
and as endowed with His own divine form.

Above this, there is a lotus in the region of the forehead, belonging
to the Lord Anantesvara, to which the aspirant can ascend by the
foregoing practice. This lotus is furnished with four *nadis*; and the
fourth syllable, *va*, of the mantra *Namasivaya* is at the center. The
names of the four *nadis* are: *nivritti*, *prastishtha*, *vidya* and *shanti*.
These *nadis* are subtle and pure. Through the practice of this kind
of dhyana, aspirants become endowed with the eight siddhis, or
supreme powers, such as the power to become very tiny, very heavy,
understand the inner thoughts of all beings, etc. Through the prac-
tice of dhyana, fixing his mind in the forehead lotus, without doubt,
one can attain supreme accomplishments.

Above the place of the forehead there ascends a path which is as
subtle and long as the subtle thread of lotus stalk. This is the place
for Lord Sadasiva, where innumerable sounds, like the loud noise
of clouds, can be heard internally. Lord Sadasiva is to be meditated
upon as shining forth with His own divine form, made of *kala* man-
tras and adorned with rising snakes. He is seated on the lotus sur-
rounded by four *nadis*: *indika*, *dipika*, *rechika* and *mochika*.

Above the region of Sadasiva mandala exists Shakti mandala,
known as kundalini. This is beyond the reach of sound, and it is
subtle in form. Shakti is seated there, surrounded by four *nadis*: *suk-
shma*, *susukshma*, *amrita* and *mrita*. Through the practice of this



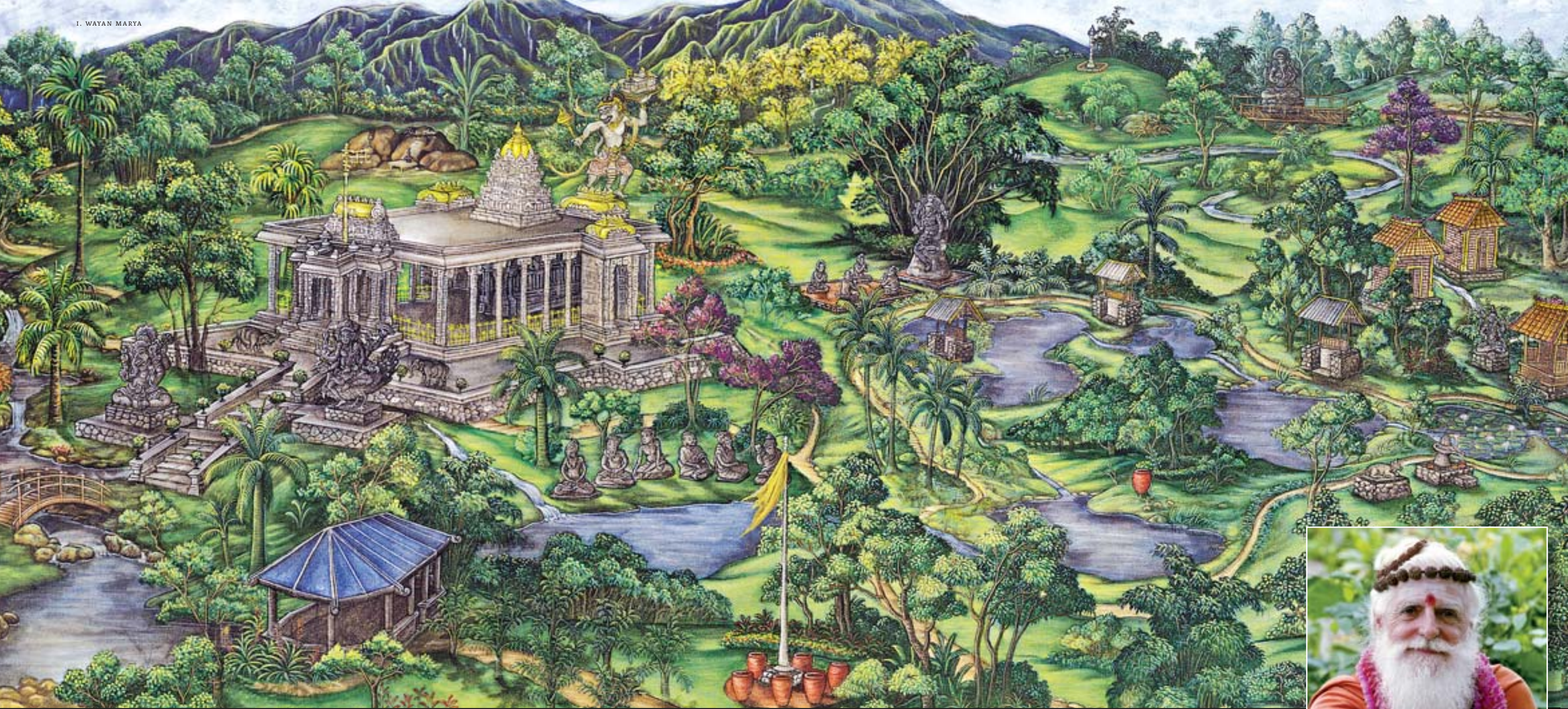
The yoga path: Following the directions of Kirana Agama, the yogi turns
his attention inward and upward to the subtle nerve currents in the head

kind of dhyana, one can become the knower of all and the doer of all.

Above the place of Shakti is the mandala of Parashakti in which
there are four *nadis*: *vyapini*, *ananta*, *anatha* and *anashrita*. She
is seated at the centre of lotus with a subtle and impeccable form.
Through the practice of this kind of dhyana, one can achieve the
power of *vyapakatva*, omnipresence, the power which is not to
be attained even by divine and celestial beings. The place existing
above Parashakti mandala is *nishkala*. It is eternal and everlasting. It
is of the nature of consciousness, and it is as still as motionless air. A
yogin who ascends to that highest mandala and gets absorbed in it,
samadhi bhavana, through the gradual practice of the dhyana pro-
cess never comes back to his mundane state. The all-powerful Lord
becomes favorably disposed toward the aspirant on account of his
devotion and continued meditation.

Dr. S. P. SABHARATHNAM, sabharathnam@gmail.com, is one of
India’s foremost experts in the Saiva Agamas.

The Vedas and Agamas are the divinely revealed and most revered
scriptures, shruti, of *Hinduism*, likened to the Torah (1200 BCE),
Bible New Testament (100 CE), Koran (630 CE) or Zend Avesta
(600 BCE). The present versions we have of the Saiva Agamas,
such as Kirana, are dated to the early first millennium ce; Dr.
Sabharathnam places their origins as far back as 8,000 bce.



FEATURE STORY

Siva's Sanctuary In Tropical Hawaii

Discover the ineffable alchemy of a Chola-style granite temple nestled in a lush jungle in the middle of nowhere

Iraivan
Temple
Video (click)

BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK

UNTOLD CENTURIES INTO THE FUTURE, travelers will encounter a finely carved granite temple set like a gemstone on a Hawaiian island—one such as only the Tamil Chola kingdoms of South India could build. Puzzled, they may wonder what age, what civilization it belonged to. They will hear about a vision, a blaze of faith and a celebration of Hinduism that began in the late 20th century, and about a seed from the Tamil lands that sprouted far away.

Hinduism was not carried here by maritime traders or travelers but by a modern-day rishi, who—with the blessings of his Sri Lankan guru—created a Saivite citadel called

Lord Siva's Western Abode: *This artist's rendering of Iraivan Temple and the San Marga Sanctuary at the foot of an extinct volcano may seem a fantasy, but the real site is no less wondrous, with its lavish gardens, lotus and koi ponds, saints' shrines, sacred rudraksha forest, meditation pavilions, waterfalls, granite statues of the guru lineage and 12-foot-tall granite statues of Siva and Hanuman; (above) Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, the visionary founder*

Kauai's Hindu Monastery and trained two generations of monks who aided him in his pioneering mission and live here still.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY, is the spiritual genius that set it all in motion. When he first set foot on this site in 1968, Gurudeva, as he is affectionately called,

realized how special the land is, charged with *prana* and palpable sanctity. He chose to make it the headquarters of his Hindu church and monastic order. A few years later, on February 15, 1975, he had an extraordinary experience. "One early morning, before dawn," he recounted, "a three-fold vision of Lord Siva came to me. First, I beheld Lord



Siva walking in a valley, then I saw His face peering into mine; then He was seated on a large stone, His reddish golden hair flowing down His back. This was the fulfillment of the quest for a vision of what the future might hold.” [See artwork on next page.]

In the Hindu tradition, there are two types of temples: those founded by men and those rare and most auspicious ones founded by the Gods through visions. Gurudeva explains how he seized the opportunity: “I felt certain that the great stone that Siva was sitting on was somewhere on our monastery land and set about to find it. Guided from within by my *satguru*, I hired a bulldozer and instructed the driver to follow me as I walked to the south edge of the property that was then a tangle of buffalo grass and wild guava. A tree deva directed my attention to a spot where there was a large rock—the self-created *lingam* on which Lord Siva had sat. A stunningly potent vibration was felt. The bulldozer’s trail now led exactly to the sacred stone, surrounded by five smaller boulders. San Marga, the ‘straight or pure path’ to God, had been created. An inner voice proclaimed, ‘This is the place where the world will come to pray.’” These visions inspired him to begin this exquisite temple, unlike any in the world. Since that day, pujas have been held daily at the spot, which will one day be sheltered with an elegant, open-air pavilion.

Today, 34 years later, the San Marga Iraivan Temple is a miracle nearing completion. It is a piece of India—its religion, culture, art and even the stones—manifesting on Kauai island. Each of the nearly 4,000 stones (the largest weighing 14,000 pounds) was

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Island temple: (clockwise from left) Masterfully sculpted pillars in black and white granite lead to the main sanctum, which will enshrine the crystal Sivalingam; Kauai island is 2,450 miles from California; (photo below) the stunning northern coast of the island

hand-carved in India and then transported across the ocean to this Pacific island 8,000 miles away—about 80 container loads in all. Iraivan Temple is believed to be the only Hindu temple in the world moved block by block from one part of the globe to another. “Arguably the most elaborate Hindu temple in the United States” is how it was described in the *Architectural Record* by Brian James Barr, who noted that it is the only temple known to be entirely hand-carved in modern times.

During Gurudeva’s travels to South India in the early 1980s, he enlisted the services of Dr. V. Ganapati Sthapati, India’s foremost temple architect, who designed the temple strictly according to the *Agamas* and *Vastu Shastras*. Sthapati was especially inspired by Gurudeva’s edict to carve the temple entirely by hand, in the old way, without the use of modern machinery. To create it, in 1991 a small village was set up for 70 traditional sculptors, called *silpis*, and their families, in Madanayakanahalli, near Bengaluru. It was there, on an arid parcel known for its cobra snakes, that each stone was sculpted.

In Hawaii, rotating teams of six *silpis* (first brought over in 2001), helped by monks and local workers, have nearly finished assembling the temple. When complete, it will weigh 1,600 tons (3,200,000 pounds) at a cost of \$16 million, which includes an \$8-million endowment to permanently support the temple and its surroundings.

While Gurudeva decreed that ancient technology be used for the temple, his monks, dressed in hand-woven cotton Indian robes, used cutting-edge Macintosh computers to design the panel art that is found on many of the pillars to create a library in stone. Among other high-tech features, sunlight is channeled into the inner sanctum via fiber-optic cables, and web conferencing



A three-fold vision: In 1975 Lord Siva appeared to Gurudeva as an infinite Being of light staring into his face. Next, he saw Siva, dressed in white, flowing robes, walking in a meadow, blessing devout pilgrims. In a third part of the vision, Siva was seated on a large boulder. Later that day, searching through the jungle, Gurudeva discovered the natural Sivalingam on which Siva sat (pictured at right).

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and iPhones are being used to coordinate every detail of the work. The new and the traditional dance together in Iraivan Temple.

The temple’s central murti is so rare that it may seem an innovation, but it is, in fact, of a kind lauded in olden scriptures. Iraivan’s inner sanctum enshrines the world’s largest single-pointed quartz crystal—a 700-pound, 39-inch-tall, six-sided natural gem, a *sphatika* Sivalingam that started growing 50 million years ago in a deep cave in Arkansas and was acquired by Gurudeva in 1987. Few know that such a crystal is, according to the *Agamas*, the most exalted of Sivalingams. Ganapati Sthapati explains, “In the Hindu culture of worship, Sivalingams are made of many materials, such as earth, wood, metal and gems. Among gems, the *sphatika* (quartz crystal) is considered very significant and sacred because it is spotless and transparent, like space. If all of the crystal Lingas in India were put together into one, they would still not equal the power of this one.”

Iraivan Temple is being built to channel and focus the spiritual power of this rare crystal Sivalingam, evoking the blessings of the Supreme God, Siva.

Like Rishikesh of Old

Hindu temples in India are today mostly encrusted within crowded cities and towns, surrounded by the cacophony of automobiles and buses. Even in America, temples are often close to highways or a stone’s throw from strip malls, chain stores and fast food places. Today, alas, few devotees attending their neighborhood temple can approach the ideal described in the *Krishna Yajur Veda*, which says, “Find a quiet retreat for the practice of yoga; sheltered from the wind, level and clean, free from rubbish, smoldering fires and ugliness, where the sound of waters and the beauty of the place help thought and contemplation.”

Iraivan Temple is set in just such a perfect locale, one that seems to have been chosen by the Gods themselves—in the midst of a lush tropical forest on a Polynesian isle, with fresh water brooks and waterfalls all around, surrounded by a limitless expanse of sky and sea which changes from green to blue to indigo. It is built on the margin of the serene Wailua River, a pristine stream coming down from the nearby volcanic mountain. There are lotus-filled ponds, thousands of



fruit-bearing and medicinal trees, and, with delightful frequency, inspiring rain-bows arching above.

Iraivan Temple is a destination for serious pilgrims. Many have testified that they were never the same after their first visit, now understanding God, soul and world differently from ever before. "I've seen a thousand temples in India and the world. Of them all, this little temple on this little island stands out to me. It is the most beautiful. It is the most pure. It is actually divine. I can hardly believe it exists." This quote is not from a celebrity or an intellectual powerhouse, nor is it from the *shas-tras* or saints. It is the voice of an ordinary devotee, unique only in her sincerity, a mother and a grandmother, an immigrant struggler who visited Iraivan Temple.

In the ancient Tamil language, *Iraivan* is an ancient Tamil word for God meaning, "He who is worshiped." This temple is a pure celebration of Lord Siva. No other Deity is represented within its precincts. Everywhere one looks, in every direction, only Siva can be seen. Ganapati Sthapati pointed out that this is how all temples were built thousands of years ago.

Kumar Naganathan Gurukkal, a priest of the temple in Lanham, Maryland, who recently visited, effused, "I don't have words to describe the temple's architecture. After seeing it, my heart becomes single-minded, without desires and thoughts about the future. Generally temples are built as per the worshipers' desire, but in Hawaii, the temple is built for the sake of the Supreme Lord."

Gurukkal was delighted to see the abundance of the landscaped gardens surrounding the temple, with Indian favorites such as betel leaf, amala, bilva and areca trees, as well as rudraksha and konrai trees: "It is wonderful to see the forest of rudraksha, which grows in certain places only by God's desire. It is not possible to plant and grow those trees anywhere except where the Lord wants them. Even in India, these trees grow only in remote places like Sabari Malai."

Ravi Rahavendran from Carlsbad, California, and his wife Sheela have been in love with Iraivan Temple from the first day they visited in 2003. Ravi shares, "The temple stretches back to the glory of ancient India." He ponders, enthusiastically, "It is written in Saivite texts that one of Siva's 108 holy abodes is Kovai. It is the only place of the 108 which cannot be located. Could Kovai be Kauai? It would not be surprising, given the sheer beauty of the island, the mystic vision and the location of the temple."

A. MANIVEL

Holy Abode

Flag pole: A teakwood pole, wrapped in copper, plated in gold, serves as the supernatural polarity to the Lingam in the sanctum, harnessing the vortex of subtle energies to create a force field, or spiritual bubble, purifying the karmas of all who walk between the two.

River path: Twelve-foot-wide stone steps lead pilgrims 150 meters up from the sacred Wailua River to the temple of God Siva. On the way, offerings can be made to Lord Ganesha and Lord Murugan.

Siva's mount: Nandi the bull represents each soul's desire for realization of God. He sits in a 16-pillared pavilion, beholding Siva night and day.

Musical pillars: Two sets of 13-foot-tall twin stone pillars resonate with precise tones of the Indian music scale when struck with a wooden mallet.

Time capsules: The story of Iraivan and the enlightened Vedic teachings will be carried into the next millennium through two time capsules buried in the foundation: a stone chamber containing etched copper plates layered in sand; and a high-tech, inert-gas, stainless-steel cylinder.

Pillars: 240 sculpted panels on the temple's pillars create a library in stone, depicting the philosophy of South Indian Saivism.

Entrance tower: Inside pilgrims encounter a wondrous stone bell.

LINKING HEAVEN & EARTH: An Agamic Siva temple connects the Divine and the material, the spirit and the body. Its every detail is mystically designed to bring the soul closer to God within.

Sacred stone: The Iraivan Temple is made of 3.2 million pounds of hand-carved granite. It is esoterically the body of the Divine and thus is not only a place of worship, but an object of worship in and of itself.

Spire: A golden crown adorns the 35-foot-tall capstone, insignia of the highest awakening at the top of the head.

Capstone: A 7-ton, elaborately carved stone, eight feet in diameter, forms the cupola of the sanctum roof. Covered with 23-carat gold leaf, it signifies the golden sahasrara chakra of the awakened soul.

Sanctum sanctorum: The 700-pound crystal kalpaka (spiritual wish-fulfilling) Sivalingam is enshrined in a granite, cave-like chamber, the innermost heart of God, who grants perfect freedom, kaivalya, from the burdens of transgressions into the Self within all.

Landscaping: The temple is surrounded by groves of exotic sacred, medicinal, fragrant and decorative plants from around the world.

Ancient wisdom: Titanium plates are inscribed with verses from the four Vedas (*Rig, Yajur, Sama* and *Atharva*) and other scriptures of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition.

Built to last 1,000 years: The four-million pound, 4-foot-high, lava-rock-clad concrete foundation sits upon a 3-foot-deep compacted gravel bed, assuring the temple's stability over the centuries.



ALL PHOTOS HINDUISM TODAY

Building as Directed by God

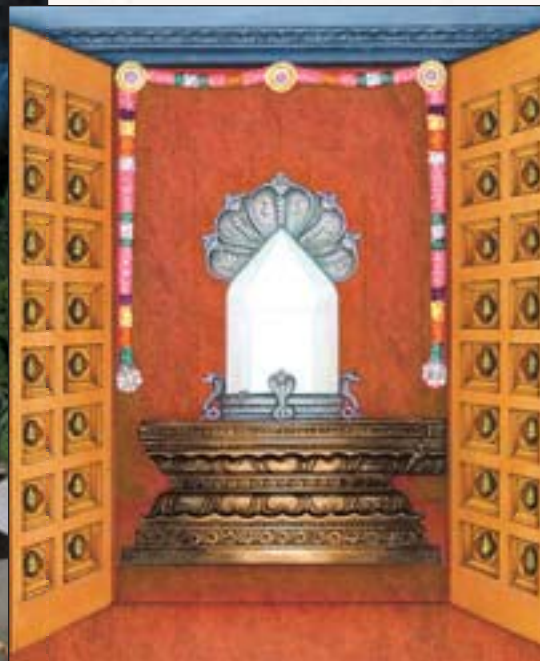
Deva and Gayatri Rajan of Canyon, California, have been devotees of Gurudeva for four decades. Deva emphasizes the divine origins of the temple: "Through the vision, Gods and devas were directly communicating with Gurudeva, directing him to have this temple built, and specifying how. The architect is one of India's most revered builders of traditional Hindu temples. His plan follows the rules of the *shastras*, creating the perfect conditions for the mystical, inner workings of a Hindu temple to happen."

Gurudeva directed that all aspects of the construction should be engineered to last a thousand years—an ambitious goal by Western standards, though many millennia-old temples persist in India today. The first challenge was to create a foundation that would last ten centuries and withstand earthquakes. The innovative expert Dr. Kumar Mehta, professor of engineering at the University of California, designed an amazingly dense 7,000-psi formula using fly ash, a coal by-product, reviving technology used in 2,000-year-old concrete Roman monuments. The result—a crack-free, 4-million-pound base using an auspicious 108 truckloads of

concrete, and no rebar—was so successful that the project was showcased in *Concrete Today*, inspiring others, including the Swaminarayan Fellowship, to adopt the technology.

Having heard from Ganapati Sthapati that dynamite shatters the molecular matrix of the quartz in the granite and "kills the stone's song," Gurudeva made another decision: to use no explosives to quarry the stone, and no power tools for the carving, so as not to disturb the life force, or *prana*, in the stone. Therefore, only chisels—tens of thousands of them—and hammers are used for quarrying and sculpting. It is a laborious process. The chisels are made of relatively soft iron, because any harder metal would transfer the unbuffered impact of the hammer's blow into the stones, causing unpredictable fractures. Chisels must be re-sharpened and re-tempered after just a few minutes of use. A blazing hot forge is used by the skilled *silpis* for the sharpening, and one gazing at their dexterous pounding on red-hot iron can feel transported to another age—for this was exactly how the grand temples of old were built.

The "chip-chip-chip" of chisels hitting hard granite that pilgrims hear around the temple site is the melody of a house for God



A. MANIVEL

A beacon for grace: Infinitely patient, inherently sacred, this one-of-a-kind, six-sided, quartz crystal is 39 inches tall and 50 million years old. Known in Sanskrit as sphatika Sivalingam, it is temporarily enshrined in the monastery's Kadavul Temple, awaiting its divine destiny as the central Deity within Iraivan Temple's holy sanctum; (above) an artist captures the crystal in the inner sanctum and its ten-thousand-pound metal base.

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being carved. When Gurudeva began negotiations for carving the stones in India, he heard murmurs that this song could be in its last notes. Nowadays, due to time and budget constraints, temples are, with rare exceptions, constructed of concrete and brick. A few use granite for the main sanctum, but even these employ machines for the main shaping, and hand chisels for the sculpting. Yes, even in India builders of holy places are asked to work cheaper and faster—hence to produce less elegant, less durable structures. Gurudeva understood that a temple carved by hand would be expensive and time-consuming. But he also knew that the most gracious work of the stone craftsman flows from his heart and his hands. Who could imagine Michelangelo's David carved by power tools? And, in one very real sense, Iraivan Temple is a three-million-pound stone sculpture.

When Iraivan began, stone cutting was a dying art in India. *Silpis* were few and almost forgotten. But in recent years, there has arisen a new appetite for elaborate stonework in both temples and homes. This means that with the small pool of available talent, there is a constant struggle to obtain and keep the



best *silpis*. Another managerial challenge in bringing this ancient craft to the modern age was the need to build the temple 8,000 miles away from the stone-carving site—usually the temple and the carving site are side by side. Coordinating such a ramified project has required expertise, patience, dedication—and no small amount of faith.

The expert and master builder in charge of the project is Selvanathan Sthapati, a fourth-generation temple architect from the family of Ganapati Sthapati. Selvanathan was given the responsibility to prepare detailed drawings and execute the site markings for the *silpis* to carve the stones at Bengaluru, as well as the technical markings for the jointing work by carvers on Kauai. For Selvanathan, working on Iraivan Temple is a mystical experience. He likes to quote Gurudeva's original intent: "From the beginning, the temple was conceived to be as rare as the vision that birthed it."

Selvanathan remembers, "Many years ago, Gurudeva gently took my hands into his and blessed me to be a *sthatpati* of this project. Ancient scriptures of our craft say that 'a *silpa* (sculpture) exists inside the *silpi* (sculptor), and then *silpi* turns into *silpa*,' evoking how a *silpi* experiences the Divine form within himself as he carves it on the outside."

Such mastery in all details has a tangible effect. "More and more I am seeing the temple not as a building as much as a gigantic sculptural masterpiece," says Paramacharya Palaniswami, editor-in-chief of HINDUISM TODAY. "It is more art than

architecture, more spirit than matter, more heavenly than earthly—though it is all those things. It is about art as devotion, art as technical craft, art as skilled energy, art as sacrifice, art as vision."

A unique touch, he adds, are 240 bas-relief stone panels on the pillars, telling in pictures and potent aphorisms the temple's story and the essence of Saivism. It is a library forever set in stone. A walk through the temple is a walk through India's great spiritual and cultural ideals, touching upon Hinduism, karma, reincarnation, states of consciousness and the yogas. Carvings teach about the various forms of Siva, about medicinal and sacred plants from India and Hawaii, meditation maps and so much more. Sheela Rahavendran dreams, "I can hardly wait to see pilgrims walking with their children from pillar to pillar, explaining a great many beautiful things about this temple, about its founder, and about Hinduism in general."

Palaniswami explains that the team in Kauai is now working on the final stages of the main temple: installing the rose-colored granite flooring stones and the lotus hand rails. In India, carving is underway on the Nandi Mandapam, a relatively small, but exquisitely elaborate, 16-pillared pavilion which will be the home for Nandi the bull, Siva's mount. The final stone works remaining to be done are the outer courtyard wall and steps down to the Wailua River.

"Since Iraivan Temple has been designed to last for so long," explains Deva Rajan, "utmost care is being taken to use the finest and

Golden towers: A first in Hindu history, the tops of Iraivan's towers are covered not with gold-plated metal, but with 23-carat gold leaf, which allows the artistry of the stonework to show through; (below) Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, the spiritual head of Kauai's Hindu Monastery, gently oversees and guides the Iraivan Temple project



most durable stone and materials. Workers are advised to 'slow down' and 'do the very best work that you can ever do'—advice seldom given to artisans on a worldly project. Where else on Earth do we find such goals as these?"

Alluring as the job might be, hiring is not easy. One doesn't find traditional Hindu stone carvers for hire in America, without whom the temple construction would be impossible. Bringing *silpi* talent to America has been difficult, especially with post-9/11 security and visa issues. When visas for the sculptors were repeatedly and wrongfully denied in 2007, threatening the closure of this and other US projects, the swamis in Hawaii led the American Hindu community in pressing for regulation changes to reflect America's growing religious diversity, acknowledging *silpis* and other occupations related to Hindu practice as qualified for the Religious Worker visa program. Palma Yanni, a prominent, expert immigration attorney in Washington, D.C. was hired, and other Hindu organizations engaged. The Hawaii swamis traveled to Washington to press their case with Senators and Representatives, orange-clad renunciates laboring in the halls of temporal power. They succeeded, and the resulting immigration policies reflect their concerns and are broad enough to accommodate most Hindu needs. Happily, the masterful, graceful carving of Iraivan Temple can continue.



Breaking Ground

On April 4-5, 1995, a grand ceremony, called *Panchasilanyasa*, brought priests and devotees from around the world to the site of Iraivan Temple for the placement of five sanctified bricks in an underground crypt, along with a cache of gems and other treasures. Warm Hawaiian breezes enveloped the faithful in a gentle embrace. Camphor, incense and flowers spoke to their senses as did the tinkling of the bells and sonorous Sanskrit, chanted loudly by vibhuti-smeared priests. Deva Rajan shares his experience of the event.

“Many priests were there from Chennai for the *homa*, including the respected Sivasri Sambamurti Sivachariar, who officiated the Hindu rituals, along with architect V. Ganapati Sthapati. A four-by-four-by-foot square pit had been dug at the northeast corner of the future inner sanctum of the Iraivan Temple. In the pitch black of the hours before dawn, no one could tell if we were in India or in Hawaii. With great ceremony, my Gurudeva, the Hindu priests, the architect and others installed sacred substances into the pit—gems, gold, silver, rare herbs and other auspicious items. Tray after tray was carried by the monks to be placed. At one point, a large pot of *vibhuti* (holy ash) was poured into the pit; hence any further offering drew clouds of vibhuti floating out of the hole, blessing us all. Under the tranquil light of the moon, Sambamurti Sivachariar, together with Gurudeva, frequently waved the glowing camphor flame. In bursts of powerful sacred chanting, the pit was consecrated. Master architect Ganapati Sthapati placed five sacred bricks engraved with the letters NA MA SI VA YA in Tamil.

After these rich and abundant blessings, Gurudeva directed a few of us to seal it all off with concrete. As the crowd dispersed, we mixed several wheelbarrows of fresh concrete and poured it into the pit. When the task was complete, with joyous hearts we drifted away, knowing we had participated in a rare and magical event that would stay with us forever.”

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Blessed moments: (Top) With an extinct volcano rising behind, the monastery's natural rock pool and waterfalls provide a magical space for Iraivan Temple (behind the flagpole); (above left) a buried chamber of sacred and precious offerings seeds the inception of Iraivan Temple; (left) amid the crush of devotees, Gurudeva waves the camphor lamp

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From the Hearts of Pilgrims

Many visitors say that once they are touched by the mystical impulse that is creating this temple, a love develops for the project and the building itself. For many, it has meant a rediscovery of their connection with Hinduism, sometimes sparked by an encounter with the founder, Gurudeva. Pilgrims come from everywhere—from India and from countries of the diaspora, as far as Hong Kong, Australia and South Africa.

Manon Mardemootoo, a senior attorney practicing in the Supreme Court of Mauritius, says though he was born in a religious Hindu family, he came to appreciate Hinduism only after meeting Gurudeva and learning from him. Ever since, Iraivan

Temple has been part of his life: “We were there in 1991 at the first chipping ceremony at Kailash Ashram, in Bengaluru, in the presence of many saints. Since then we have been following the progress on works both at the Bengaluru carving site and at Kauai, which we have been visiting regularly.” In his heart, of all the temple's features the main *murti* stands unrivalled. “The main sanctum's *sphatika* Sivalingam is worthy of a deeper understanding. Crystals are known to possess intelligence and qualities yet to be discovered.”

Mardemootoo is a “temple builder,” one of a dedicated group of people on several continents who devote part of their lives to making Iraivan Temple manifest, both

Chip, chip, chip: *Silpis in Bengaluru, India, work on the guru parampara stone that sits above the sanctum door*

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 with fund-raising and personal support. He takes this job seriously. “We feel particularly privileged to be ‘temple builders,’ as it is the greatest assignment which can be entrusted to us humans. The more people participate in spiritual endeavors, the more our planet benefits—which is presently very much in need of love and protection. I feel happy to be part of this project; it's like being on a holy adventure, led by our loving Gurudeva, into our Self and the inner worlds.” His whole family is involved, along with sponsors and well-wishers they have introduced to the project. Mardemootoo adds, “We are all looking forward to the *mahakumbhabhisheka* (consecration ceremony) of Iraivan Temple, an auspicious day, a tremendous source of power for all.”

The Rahavendrants from California shared how they were touched by the weave of selfless monasticism and sincere worship that pervades Kauai's Hindu Monastery. Sheela Rahavendran recalls that she was overcome with emotion, just facing Lord Murugan, Ganesha and Siva in the monastery's 36-year-old Kadavul Temple, and could not get up to leave. After their first visit, just a few years ago, they took God's blessings home and allowed that energy to change themselves and their lives. After Sheela's return to California, a major transformation occurred. “I became

The Patient Sculptors' Skills

THE CHIPPING SOUNDS RARELY STOP AS chisel and hammer pummel the reluctantly yielding stone. It is more a form of erosion than carving, a slow pulverizing of the granite a few hundred molecules at a time. Millions and hundreds of millions of blows by the sculptors slowly reveal the design. It is a labor of love requiring a level of patience that few are capable of, and thus the rarity of it all. To onlookers, this seems an impossibly tedious task, but carvers say it brings a greater reward—after all, this is God's work. One single piece can take three or four men three long years to complete, and any serious mishap will put the work to waste.

Make no mistake, these artisans know their stone. While finishing work needs but a delicate etching of a fine-pointed chisel, basic shaping requires powerful blows that will cut open large boulders in minutes. The skilled *silpis* know the full

range of the creative process, learned by most at their father's knee.

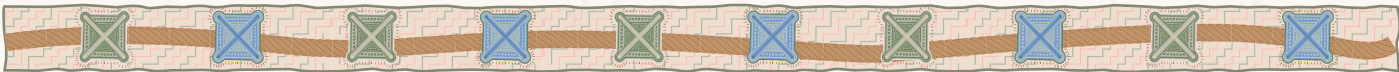
How a temple evolves from raw stone to finished art is a story of stones, chisels and the blacksmith's fire. The *sthapati* is the architect who designs and guides the transformation of raw granite into iconic statues and mighty temples, aided by an army of *silpis* or sculptors. Based on his precise design and markings, the *silpis* shape the stones to perfection.

The stones are then maneuvered, lifted, nudged together and finely fitted, the goal being the famed “paper joint,” so tight the thinnest paper cannot find the space between them. Laden with the devotion their creators' impart, graced with the design of ancient wisdom, the stones merge, one by one, to create the massive temple structure. Alone they are

marvelous works of art, but together they possess the power to contain God Himself, to be His body and His home.

This traditional knowledge, training and skill is passed from father to son, and each generation is initiated into this sacred art in childhood and youth. Iraivan Temple's Selvanathan Sthapati, who inherited this wealth of knowledge from his paternal uncle and father, relates, “I was brought up in a home filled with the sound of chisels and hammers. Even as a child I learned the skills by watching the moves at our *pat-tarai* (workshop). Early on, I began exploring the nuances and curves of traditional designs that would be my lifelong occupation, and my legacy.”





God in the details: (top to bottom) Great effort goes into setting finished pieces in place, as during this stone lift for the rajagopuram; elaborate designs, drawn with iron oxide paste and charcoal, are transmuted from two-dimensional, ephemeral markings into three-dimensional, permanent sculptures; carving chisels

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a vegetarian, just like that—no meat, eggs or fish, and I have been that way ever since.” Kauai became a lifelong love. “The journey on San Marga, the straight path through glades and streams leading to Iraivan Temple, is a metaphor for the evolution of the soul unto its potential. It serves as an inspiration for self transformation in this lifetime,” notes Sheela. “There, spiritual upliftment is felt in every pore of one’s being. Sheer *sattvic* energy begs the devout Hindu to return time and time again on pilgrimage to Kauai.”

Iraivan Temple is a sanctuary for Hindus, but here people of all faiths report experiencing a sense of a divine presence. A local Christian minister told the monks, “This is the first time I really feel I am walking on holy ground.” Dr. Nilufer Clubwala, a pediatrician in Campbell Hall, New York, and Zoroastrian by faith, has been inexplicably drawn to Iraivan Temple. “My first experience of Iraivan Temple was in a vivid dream I had many years before my first encounter with Gurudeva. It was a sparkling white temple pulsing with an energy I had never felt before. Several years later while in Kauai, walking around on the temple grounds, I recognized this to be the very place that I had seen in that hard-to-forget dream years ago. As in the dream, I was suffused with the energy of the place. Pure, powerful and vibrant. No words of description can do it justice—it has to be experienced.”

Since then, Nilufer and family have made it a point to travel to Kauai every year, watching the temple rise up. She notes, “What makes this temple so special to me is the fact that so much more than granite has gone into its making. It is the love, time, contributions and energy of the devotees and friends of the temple, the unending dedication of the monastics who manage its construction, and the hard work of the *silpis* as they tirelessly chip away at the granite. All these factors magically come together as we see Gurudeva’s vision take form as Iraivan Temple.”

Though it will be a few years before the main structure of the temple is completed, pilgrims come in a steadily growing stream to experience the sanctity, which, many attest, is already there.

A Stronghold of Saivism

The long-term planning and daily functioning of the temple is managed by the Saiva Siddhanta Yoga Order. For Ravi Rahavendran, the monks’ involvement with the project is key to his enthusiastic support: “Their presence enables a strong and continuous connection to the inner worlds.” As Deva Rajan points out, “Unlike the ever-changing boards of directors that manage most Hindu temples, this monastic order brings to the management a consistency and stability that is free of politics and personal motives.”

Ravi is amazed that since March 12, 1973, the monks have been conducting pujas every three hours, 24 hours a day, at the smaller Kadavul Temple, located at the heart of the monastery. That’s over 36 years without missing a single puja, eight times a day. For this reason, Ravi states, “One can actually experience divine energy here.” By the time this issue of HINDUISM TODAY arrives on the newsstands on July 1, 2009, the monks will have performed 106,069 uninterrupted vigils (three-hour spiritual watches each takes by turn), building up the vibration.

While Iraivan is the jewel of Kauai’s Hindu Monastery, several other initiatives upholding dharma are driven by the monks. It is from the monastery that HINDUISM TODAY is published each quarter; books and pamphlets are created and distributed, and the multi-million-dollar Hindu Heritage Endowment is managed as a public service for Hindu institutions worldwide.

Every task—be it looking after the land, tending to the monastery’s gentle cows, supervising the building of the temple or publishing books and magazines about the Sanatana Dharma—is an act of devotion by the monks. Gurudeva left in writing: “What makes the San Marga Iraivan Temple, the *moksha sphatika* Sivalingam, our small and large shrines and publication facilities so special is that they are part of a monastery, or *aadheenam*: the home of a spiritual master, a satguru, and his tirelessly devoted *sadhakas*, yogis, swamis and *acharyas*. Moreover, this Aadheenam is a theological seminary for training monks from all over the world to take holy orders of sannyasa and join the great team of our Saiva Siddhanta Yoga Order. From the world over, devotees pilgrimage to Kauai Aadheenam, our headquarters. From here Iraivan’s *sphatika moksha* Sivalingam shines forth.”

Gifts of Love

The building of Iraivan Temple, a project so complex in scope and details, entails boundless time and enormous expense. It is the generosity of thousands of devotees that has been making this vision a reality. Gurudeva directed that the temple be built without any debt. That means that efficient and

continuous fund-raising is a must.

Palaniswami recounts, “We have raised \$12 million toward our \$16-million goal. Though we have received a handful of large donations, by far the majority of all funding has come in the form of small, regular donations from our 12,000 contributors in 58 countries around the world.”

In Gurudeva’s trips to India, he saw many majestic temples that had fallen into neglect, with too little funding to maintain them, staffed by a handful of underpaid priests. Determined that Iraivan never suffer that fate, Gurudeva established a maintenance endowment, stipulating that half of every dollar donated go into that endowment. In this way he ensured that Iraivan Temple will continue to flourish in the future. Once the temple is consecrated, the endowment will be \$8 million, providing sufficient income that the monks will never again have to raise funds to care for the temple. Iraivan’s endowment has been set up so that its principal cannot be spent under any circumstances, but generates income year after year.

Sannyasin Shanmuganathaswami, the monastery’s financial administrator, describes the fund-raising efforts: “First, Gurudeva concentrated on paying off the land. It was the late 80s before we started raising funds for the building itself. Fund-raising was hard in those days because there was no actual building to point to. Starting out with just a few close devotees, the monks used the modern tools of technology to get the word out.” Swami explains that ground-breaking technology was, to his guru, a wonderful tool for productivity that he enthusiastically embraced. Gurudeva might even have created the world’s first photo blog in 1998, when he instructed his monks to post photos and daily news—before the word *blog* was coined. This daily news site is called Today at Kauai Aadheenam, or TAKA.

The monastery has a user-friendly, resource-rich website (www.himalayanacademy.com) with vivid images and text bringing Iraivan Temple into the homes of devotees. Contributions have come from people who have never set foot on Kauai. The list of countries involved is astonishing. One might ask, does it include faraway places such as Norway? Yes it does. What about mother India, colorful Guadeloupe, Brazil, Mauritius, Trinidad, Australia? Yes, donations come from those places as well. No country is too far for Siva’s devotees to be touched by the dream of Iraivan Temple. For them, instantaneous *darshan* available with a click of the mouse is important. On TAKA, these virtual pilgrims in faraway lands can see, day by day, Iraivan rising with their contributions. They hope to worship, one day, at the temple they are helping to build.

Most temples are based around a local



Rising to the skies: The architect’s elevation drawings of Iraivan Temple; an ornate jalakam, stone window, is guided into place by silpis and monks on a sunny Kauai day

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community and are a reflection of its population. In contrast, Iraivan has a global flavor. This has been motivating, especially for Hindus outside of India who resonate to the pure Saivite tradition that thrives in this place of tranquility and peace. Wherever they live, however troubled the times or the region, they find solace in the fact that on Kauai things are right with the world.

The monastery's printed newsletter has also been a vital tool in getting the word out, since it lists everyone who has given to the temple in the previous month, as well as the total raised. This inspires people who are new to the project to start giving regular donations to

help bring Gurudeva's vision into manifestation. "It has worked well, and it has set a model for other temples on how to keep in touch, as a well-knit family weave," Shanmuganathaswami attests.

Malaysia plays a special role in this project. Dedicated Malaysians, constituting one-third of the *sishtyas* of Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Gurudeva's successor, have shown their commitment by raising funds to cover the cost of Iraivan Temple's rose-colored floor. Malaysian devotees are creative fund-raisers, holding lively meetings and engaging in projects such as producing key chains to sell, with pictures and Saivite motifs, usually a

photo of Gurudeva.

Personal stories color each pound of stone. Nageswaran and Rajeswari Nagaratnam of Sydney, Australia, volunteered to fund the carving of the *gomukai*—the stone that holds the water pouring out from the sanctum after an *abhishekam*—becoming the first, in February, 1993, to sponsor a single temple artifact. Another sponsor donated \$108,000 for the capstone. Faithful Nandi, Siva's sacred bull carved in black granite, was sponsored by devotees from Singapore. Most donations come in the form of an ongoing pledge, setting up an automatic charge on one's credit card or bank account for a modest sum

every month. The constant flow such donations bring is key to the project's stability.

Shanmuganathaswami tells us there are ways to support a Hindu temple with money that would normally be paid to the government in the form of taxes. "We've been encouraging people to put the temple in their wills. We hired a planned giving consultant to help devotees write effective estate plans to help their family finances as well as the project. It's a situation where everyone wins, but few people realize they can make their legacy continue to work for what they cared for in life." Many people remember the temple in their wills. One donor took out a \$750,000 life insurance policy, making Iraivan Temple the owner and beneficiary.

Botanical bliss: *Pilgrims pose at the temple site; lush Kauai has stunning natural beauty, including this natural Bali Hai waterfall near the temple; over the years, the monks have collected sacred, culinary, medicinal and legendary plants from Asia that gracefully merge with the Polynesian flora; ponds of lotus flowers, symbol of spiritual evolution*

Iraivan Temple's fund-raising is not immune to bad economic times: the Hindu Heritage Endowment suffered losses in 2008, along with everyone else. But Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami assures, "For us, what matters is the long-term performance. When the market eventually comes back up, so will our endowment's assets." We can all learn from a monk's patience, and for a temple being built to last for a thousand years, this certainly rings true.

A Place of Pilgrimage Today

While Iraivan Temple's consecration ceremony is a few years away, even today, many families make this holy spot the destination of their pilgrimage, with the goal of worshipping in Kadavul Hindu Temple. This powerful sanctuary, founded in 1973, is a fire temple, said to burn karmas, enshrining a 6-foot-tall bronze, Lord Nataraja Deity. There, surrounded by 108 golden dancing Sivas, pujas are held every day at 9am. Pilgrims can be seen walking the monastery's peaceful grounds, meditating by the river or worshipping at the site of the *svayambhu* Lingam.

Visiting pilgrims ask, "When will the temple will be completed?" As the monks like to say, there are no deadlines—the temple will be completed when all the money is raised. At the current rate of progress, the temple will be consecrated and opened for worship around 2017.

Speaking from the intuitive state of awareness he called the "inner sky," Gurudeva expounded his heart's vision for the temple: "Iraivan Temple, with Lord Siva facing south, is a moksha temple. This means that being in the presence of its *sanctum sanctorum* brings the pilgrim closer to freedom from rebirth on this planet. The vibration of the temple wipes away the dross of the subconscious *vasanas* and simultaneously heals the wounds of psychic surgery. It takes away encumbrances and releases the pristine beauty of the soul. As pilgrims leave the San Marga Sanctuary, they carry away with them a new self-image and a clearer understanding of the purpose of life on planet Earth. Here, Hindus find the center of themselves." 🍽️

Artful Wonderments

A WISH-FULFILLING CRYSTAL, WHIMSICAL MUSICAL PIL-lars, powerful lions and a giant stone bell. These are among the awe-inspiring features that spark the pilgrim's humility, elevate his thoughts and surround him in his divine quest.

Iraivan Temple emulates the architectural style of South India's Chola empire, which reached its zenith 1,000 years ago. Crowning the temple is a giant 7-ton monolithic capstone that took four men three years to carve. Hanging at each of the temple's four corners is an eight-foot-long chain, with graceful 14-inch links, impossibly carved from one block of granite (*pictured on the left*).

A 32-inch-diameter stone bell rings like metal when struck with a mallet. The wooden doors to the main sanctum are elaborately carved with ten forms of Siva and hung on an ornate black granite frame.

The Sivalingam is the largest single-pointed quartz crystal on earth. Its traditional five-metal base weighs nearly 10,000 pounds and is the largest cast in modern times.

Carvers will chisel two musical pillars from black granite, each 5 feet wide and 13 feet tall. From the massive stone

which forms the central portion, craftsmen will carve out sixteen 4-inch-wide, 5-foot-long rods which, when struck, will resonate musical tones. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, just three South Indian temples were built with musical pillars. Iraivan will be the first temple outside India to have these rare artifacts, which are used by musicians to tune their instruments.

Guarding Iraivan's entrance are two *yalli* sculptures representing inner-plane beings who are a magical combination of seven animal species. Six lion pillars supporting three surrounding towers complete the temple's inner-plane guard. As if to show off the silpis' skill, each lion holds in his mouth a three-inch stone ball, which children love to turn with their hands, though no amount of cajoling will release it!

On the north side of the temple stands a stately statue of Siva as Dakshinamurti, the South-Facing Lord, Universal Guru and Silent Preceptor, teaching four sages seated before Him. The noble black granite Nandi, Siva's mount, will be enshrined in a 16-pillared pavilion in front of the main entrance, not far from three stone elephants who are



climbing the steps to see Siva.

Visitors to Iraivan will be intrigued to learn that there are treasures even beneath the temple. Hindu temples traditionally have copper plates stored in a rock crypt sealed in the foundation, recording the history of the temple's creation and the times. Iraivan not only has these but also a modern argon-gas-filled stainless steel canister containing present-day artifacts. Scheduled to be opened 1,000 years from now, these two time capsules will reveal to future generations a treasured record of the philosophy and culture of Hinduism, and of how Hindus lived and followed their faith.

Poetry in stone: (*edge of left page*) One of the temple's four eight-foot-long chains, carved from a single piece of stone; (*left*) 100 feet north of the temple, this awesome 20,000-pound, 12-foot-tall Dakshinamurti sits beneath a sprawling banyan tree, a favorite photo spot for visitors.



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CULTURE

Irish Embrace Hinduism's Healing Heart

India's dazzling arts, joyous festivals, sundry foods and inclusive attitudes are changing the conversation in Northern Ireland's conflict-weary community

Emigrant Hindus are often changed by the countries they move to. But, as recounted in this story, imported Hindu culture and values may also offer a productive approach to resolving local quarrels.

BY MARY TAYLOR, BELFAST

ON A SUNNY SUNDAY IN APRIL, 2009, I wandered down Belfast's Ormeau Road to St. George's Market, where I witnessed the impossible. Politicians from opposite extremes mingled merrily with people from diverse communities, and with each other. All were clearly having lots of fun. How did that happen? A new UN peace initiative? No, this one was arranged by Northern Ireland's Hindus.

This remarkable event was a Vaisakhi celebration organized by the Indian Community Centre on April 19. The day has multiple significance: it's the beginning of the New Year

in various regions of India, the beginning of planting season and the Sikh New Year, to mention a few. But how were the locals going to get their tongues around *Vaisakhi*, or alternative names such as Maha Vishuba Sankranti or Naba Barsha? "They might have thought it was too Indian, and stayed away," explained Ashok Sharma, ICC Chair. So, "Festival of India" it was, and nearly five thousand people took part.

The renowned London Sitar Ensemble set the mood, and VIP guests from London's Indian High Commission graced the occasion, as Belfast's formerly warring tribes explored an enticing, multicultural array of arts and crafts, clothing, jewelry, statues, books, therapies and foods. Men, women and children tried on Indian clothing, keen to be photographed in their dazzling outfits. Visitors lingered over their choices: coffees and teas in dozens of varieties, Nepalese shawls in soft

woven wool, Spanish paella, French, Italian and Irish cheeses, handmade bead necklaces. An Ayurvedic stall offered herbal remedies, beauty treatments and massage. Even tours to India were on offer. Tempted by the delicious aromas, and thankful to find a seat in the crowded market, I enjoyed a delicious masala dosa and a cup of lassi. ICC's happy Hindus were chatting merrily with everyone—and this encouraged even the most taciturn locals to talk to one another. Most of the time we all had to yell above the music—but that just made things more relaxed.

Cultural performances filled the afternoon. Beginning and ending with Indian dance, it was quite a mix: Irish and African folk, Indian classical music, hip-hop, Bollywood melodies, Punjabi Bhangra and even a cheerleading team. The wealth of sights and sounds paused only for the politicians to perform. Artistry was evident here, too. Jeffrey

Donaldson, of the Democratic Unionist Party, shared a platform with Sinn Féin's Gerry Kelly. "Diversity is enriching our lives," declared Donaldson. "We want an intercultural society," agreed Kelly. In the middle of a Hindu party, the two junior ministers of the Northern Ireland Assembly together announced funding of US\$15 million to support the integration of minority ethnic communities, with \$66,000 going to the event's organizers, the Indian Community Centre.

Lord Mayor, Tom Hartley, spoke warmly of the Indian Community Centre. "We are much richer as a city for what they contribute, both in a social and a cultural sense. They help us to be an open and tolerant city." Politicians from all the main parties wandered freely among the people. Taking care of everyone was Inspector Jeremy Adams, Hate Crime head for the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Northern Irish people, in his view, had become "a lot more culturally aware, and a large majority respect diversity." But, he said, "small numbers don't respect diversity." Many people present, including Alasdair McDonnell, MP, expressed horror at a recent racist attack on four Hungarian women.

"Ani-mates" stallholder Paula Wynburne, of European parentage, said she was no longer conscious of looking different. In the past, she said, "Ireland was very insular, and it was quite racist." Paula welcomed the presence

of Hinduism and other religions, "because it is not good for Northern Ireland to have just Catholics and Protestants." Fran and Tony had a Spanish food stall, La Terreta. "Indian people are good guys. I like them," said Fran. What does he think about Hinduism? "I am not a religious man. No politics, no religion."

"Hinduism is not only a religion, it is something fundamental about human beings," offered Hardev Sirpal, importer for Legendary Overseas. "Indian culture is so vast and diverse. Hindus will meet with and work with everybody. We have many Gods because there are so many nice people."

It was a colorful affair. Not just the performers, but all members of the Indian Community Centre had dressed in their New Year's best. Ashok Sharma wore a deep grey-blue and silver kurta, with a red scarf. Vinod Tandon blended East and West by wearing an Indian collarless shirt with a crisp lounge suit. Anil Gautam, chairman of ICC's senior citizens' club, was particularly stylish in long kurta, churidar and dupatta, all in embroidered cream damask. Ladies on the events committee were resplendent in matching red and cream sarees, matching bindi dots, sparkly bangles and an array of pearls and pendants sufficient to outdo Mayor Hartley's gold chain of office. The politicians, along with Lord Diljit Rana who welcomed them, were conservative in their suits and

Critic's choice: (left to right) India Community Centre chairman Ashok Sharma at center with (from left to right) Jeffrey Donaldson of the Democratic Unionist Party, Danisha Kazi, Amy Patel, and Donaldson's political opposite, Gerry Kelly of Sinn Féin; the Virsa Punjab Bhangra dance troupe's drummer, Gurdeep Singh; the troupe with rhythm instruments

ties, until ICC's ladies garlanded them with smart red Indian scarves. But the dancers put the rest in the shade.

Bhangra is traditionally a men's dance; in the Punjab, it is always performed on Vaisakhi. The male troupe Virsa Punjab, resplendent in royal blue, gold and violet, performed a stunning *shika* folk dance. Another vigorous display was given by the Belfast Hip Hop Academy. Cheerleading group Sandy Row Falcons displayed the gymnastic talents of Belfast's sporty girls. In contrast, the Indian classical ladies were exquisitely delicate. Amy Patel, in a rich golden yellow pleated blouse with a deep blue satin skirt, performed classical Kathak dances. Danisha Kazi, her pink, green and gold pleats draped prettily throughout her intricate movements, performed Bharata Natyam dance, including a special, beautiful and sacred dance dedicated to Lord Krishna.



MEL BOYLE



ARTSEKTA

Hinduism, Irish style: (left to right) Kathak dancer Amy Patel at the Festival of India; Hindu bhanga dancers fit right in for the St. Patrick's Day parade in Belfast; Irish fans join the Hindu Holi celebration; the Indian Community Centre is headquartered in part of a former Methodist church; (far right, below) ICC temple

Indian Community Centre

ICC, the organization behind the event, is based in North Belfast. North Indian settlers established the Centre in 1979 "to glorify the hallowed name of our Lord and celebrate our Hindu identity." Although grants are available for integration (i.e., for a minority to establish an identity within the larger community), the Centre runs on donations, taking no government funding. Resident priest Krishnan Gopi Sharma is highly qualified in Vedic studies and Sanskrit. The North Indian style worship in the Centre's temple begins with Gayatri Mantra and ends with Shanti Mantra. Ashok Sharma explained: "Shanti Mantra is a prayer for everyone and everything. It is chanted every day at the end of every prayer, both here in the temple and in people's homes."

Diversity is reflected in the temple's range of Deities, which include Vishnu, Lakshmi, Krishna, Radha, Durga, Siva, Parvati, Ganesha, Rama, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman. Cultural activities—arts, history, socializing—enliven the rooms surrounding the temple. Original features, including stained-glass windows, reflect the building's Methodist origins. Visitors are surprised to meet a religious community that is inclusive but not proselytizing. Catholics, Protestants and others are encouraged to share in the goodness of Indian culture, without being asked to adopt it as their own. It is a useful example in a region with a painful history of religious and political division.

On March 25, 2009, the ICC hosted the Wednesday Club from Castlerock, near Coleraine, County Antrim, a senior citizens' group, which includes both Protestants and Catholics. Ashok Sharma has had plenty of

practice introducing Indian culture and religion to Northern Irish people. Addressing a common puzzlement about Hinduism's many Deities raised by a guest, he joked: "If one God doesn't listen to me, I'll worship another one." More seriously, he said the *Bhagavad Gita's* message is a universal one: stand up for your rights and protect the weaker members of society. Durga's many arms, he explained, portray Her many powers. Office manager Bidit Dey added that Durga is the Mother, which led into the topic of women's place in Hinduism. In reply to a question about arranged marriages, Sharma explained this is not the same as forced marriage. "We call it the unity of two families."

After the talk, the Wednesday Club heartily enjoyed a vegetarian lunch, despite Northern Ireland's entrenched carnivorous habits. Then Bidit Dey invited all the visitors into the temple. The women accepted. The men were less enthusiastic, but appreciated that nobody here was trying to persuade them to change their religion. "Indians have mixed in well," said Owen Moody. "They don't try to put their views down your throat." Owen Caulfield and Harold Woodend were impressed with how long Indian culture has been going on, and believed it had contributed greatly to Northern Ireland. Caulfield approved of ICC's preservation of Indian culture. "All cultures should be preserved," he concluded.

Historical Parallels

How have incoming Indians managed to engage with Northern Ireland so meaningfully? Like India, Ireland struggled against a colonial power, and suffered a painful partition. The Republic of Ireland gained independence without the North, which

remained part of the UK. The 1921 partition was on a smaller scale than that of India and Pakistan, but with similar results. However, while Gandhi's struggle for freedom was a pacifist one, the Provisional IRA, and its political wing Sinn Féin, embraced peaceful means only recently.

The Indian Community Centre and Temple is located in Sinn Féin MLA Gerry Kelly's North Belfast constituency. After the formal speeches at Festival of India, Kelly strolled among the crowd, wearing a tilak, and confessed he knows nothing about Hinduism. "But I know nothing about Catholicism either," he grinned. Though many people associate the Irish republicanism of Sinn Féin with Catholics, it is a secular political party.

Kelly does know about Gandhi's leadership in the Indian struggle against British rule. Relating this to the Irish conflict, he noted that Gandhi's methods were not the only means to independence. Nevertheless, peaceful methods prevailed in Northern Ireland in 1998, with significant political reward to the extreme political parties. Perhaps Kelly had inadvertently been influenced by his Hindu constituents. Ramesh Chada, who has lived in Northern Ireland for fifty years, explained: "We live by a set of morals that include peaceful means, and we hope this example will spread to all the Northern Irish communities."

Hindus did not escape violent attack during "The Troubles," as the long-running conflict was called. Ashok Sharma's own restaurant, Archana, on Belfast's Dublin Road, was bombed nine times. Rajni Sharma was a schoolgirl when her father's retail store, Shukla's, was targeted. Rajni was in the shop with her cousin Ashok when a man placed a bag near the checkout, shouting, "There's



ARTSEKTA

a bomb in it." Rajni escaped through a back exit, while young Ashok bravely picked up the bag and moved it outside the front door.

Hindu values are seeping gradually into the Northern Irish consciousness. The ancient term *sampav* is close in meaning to religious tolerance, Punjabi women at ICC explained, and its literal meaning is "same attitude." A similar concept, "parity of esteem," emerged in the nineties and was instrumental in Northern Ireland's peace process.

ArtsEkta

Over the years, the Indian community has grown more diverse, and ICC is no longer the only game in town. Ramesh Chada explained, "Until ten years ago, 95% of Indians here were from the Punjab." Then South Indian students and professionals started to arrive, followed by Indians from a variety of regions and backgrounds. ArtsEkta, a multicultural group which celebrates diversity, began when young modernizers, Nisha Tandon, Mukesh Sharma and others, split from ICC around five years ago. The group emphasizes the arts rather than traditional religious activities. "So," I asked Nisha, "are you religious or not?" She replied that she does not feel the need to worship in temples

or to fast, but she prays daily. Her favorite prayers? The Gayatri Mantra and and Satyameva Jayate, Indian's national motto, which means "Truth alone Triumphs."

ArtsEkta will hold its third annual Belfast Mela this summer. This year saw their first Holi celebration on March 15. Thousands of adults and children, a variety of ethnic minorities as well as the white majority, all came together to cavort with colored powders. The event included many stalls displaying foods and crafts from a wide range of cultures. Multicultural music and dance performances provided energizing entertainment. Hundreds joined in the colored powder frenzy, and almost everyone joined in the dancing. Only two days later, this capable and energetic arts group led the St. Patrick's Day parade through Belfast's city center, dressed in Indian costume and showing off a fine-looking cycle-rickshaw.

The Hindu Impact on Ireland

Diversity, for many people, means little more than asserting their own rights. Hinduism's entry into the public domain and its intercultural work has transformed Northern Ireland's inward focus on two communities, the Protestants and the Catholics. Local Hin-



ICC



ICC

dus, by engaging meaningfully with cultural difference, have demonstrated a better way of life to their Christian neighbors during thirty years of conflict and beyond.

Brian Lambkin, founding director of the Centre for Migration Studies in Omagh, praised the Festival of India as "a substantial expression of the rest of the world in the center of Belfast" which "broadens people's perspective and alters how the local community sees newcomers." The Indian community's role has been as "a means of integration and peace outside the political process," declared Duncan Morrow, director of Northern Ireland's Community Relations Council. "A non-white, non-Christian minority with a generosity of spirit created different conversations around difference, which fed back into conversations around sectarianism." Referring to the Indian community's outreach work, he added, "They engaged people on a totally different basis. They provided relief from a deadlocked sectarian strife." And the result? "Celebrating diversity became possible."

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EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

Approaching GOD

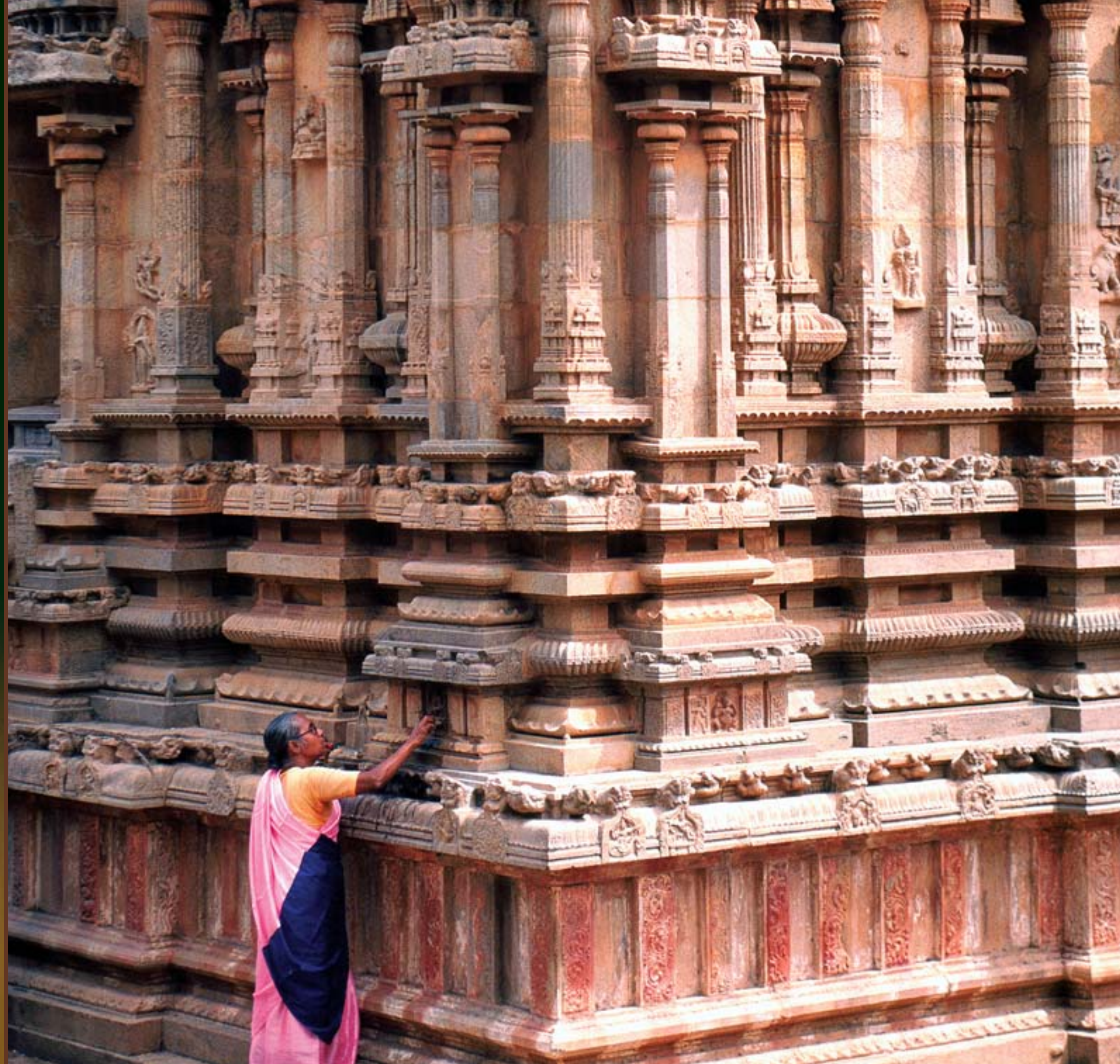
Elements of Worship &
From Shrine to Temple

Excerpts from Stephen
P. Huyler's Classic Work:
*Meeting God, Elements
of Hindu Devotion*

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Tanjavur, Tamil Nadu: Although the central image in the temple is the primary focus for worship, there are many smaller shrines and niches throughout the grounds that draw the attention of devotees. Here, an elderly woman lights a lamp to God Subramaniam in a small niche outside the sanctum of the Brihadishwara Temple.

STEPHEN P. HUYLER



1. Elements of Worship

Like Ramachandran in the story below, many Hindus observe a weekly fast, the choice of day depending upon the Deity to whom they have vowed. Whether fasting or not, worshipping at home or in the temple, all Hindus begin their day by bathing. It is considered essential to approach a Deity in as clean a manner as possible, both in body and in dress. Even the very poor and destitute will wash in a local reservoir or under a hand pump before approaching their household or community shrine. Those that live in the desert or in drought conditions will still sprinkle a few drops of precious water on their faces, hands and feet before beginning their pujas. Those who can afford it always put on fresh clothes in order to pray, the men either in simple traditional dress or contemporary pants and shirts, the women, depending on the region, in their cleanest saris or sets of tunic and pajamas, or blouses, skirts and veils. Footwear is always taken off before entering a shrine—one symbolically removes the dirt of the outside world and enters the sacred space clean in body and in spirit.

For the Hindu, once the image of a Deity has been consecrated it is believed to be the Deity incarnate, no matter what its form. It may be an unaltered element of nature, such as a rock or tree or body of water; or it could be a stone or woodcarving, or a casting in brass or bronze, or a painting, even a mass-produced print. The rituals of consecration for temple images are elaborate and closely prescribed through ancient texts and canons. The installation of images in the household shrine may be less complex, depending upon the traditions of the caste, family and community; but once the images are consecrated, they are, nevertheless, viewed as Deities themselves and are accorded

profound respect. Images in temples and shrines are given the same treatment that would be shown to royalty or to a very honored guest. In a temple this preferential treatment, called *upachara*, is carried out by the chief priest and, possibly, his assistants; while in the home it is most often the responsibility of the senior female, the matriarch.

The first thing every morning, the image is gently awakened. Then it is bathed in holy water that comes from the Ganga (the Ganges River, which is also viewed as a Goddess) or from another sacred body of water. There are many sacred rivers, streams and springs in India. Whatever its source, any water used in a shrine is considered to be mystically transformed into Ganga. After the image's initial bath, it is anointed with other substances believed to enhance its purity. Prints or paintings, for obvious reasons, cannot receive daily applications of liquids. They are instead cleaned carefully and may be adorned with sacred powders and with garlands of flowers. Sculptures are first anointed with one substance, then rinsed with holy water; a second substance is applied, and again the sculpture is washed with water before the third application, and so on. These materials vary according to local traditions, but often include honey, milk, yogurt, oil, sandalwood paste or turmeric, coconut water, a mixture of five fruits

.....
Bedla, Udaipur District, Rajasthan: *The primary image of the Deity in a temple, such as this image of the Goddess Durga, may well have been worshiped in this spot for untold centuries. Each day She will be washed, adorned with sacred substances, dressed, bejeweled and garlanded before the public is allowed to see Her.*

Ramachandran's Weekly Visit to the Temple

Having just shaved and bathed, Ramachandran wraps the three meters of his clean, freshly starched white cotton dhoti around his waist. He places a matching shawl over his shoulders, leaving his chest bare. He then steps into his rubber sandals and slips out the door of his home. Just in front of him, his younger sister has almost finished painting an elaborate kolam, a sacred design on the ground before the door made with bleached rice flour. It is an activity that either she, or his mother or his aunt, performs every day of the year. As he walks carefully around it, he admires the beautiful lotus she is creating. All around him the town is coming to life. He weaves between countless other kolams as he moves down the street, waving to his neighbor, an old man intent on milking his cow. Ramachandran is on his way to the temple.

Today is Tuesday, dedicated in South India to the Goddess Mariamman, an embodiment of Shakti, the feminine power that conquers evil and heals disorder. When Ramachandran was just sixteen, he vowed that for the rest of his life he would fast every Tuesday. Now ten years have past, and he still maintains his vow. After his bath before sunrise, he drank a cup of

tea and ate some rice cakes. For the rest of the day he will have only liquids, keeping his mind and body ritually pure in order to be a proper vessel to receive the Goddess's guidance. Although Ramachandran worships Mariamman every day in his household shrine, on Tuesdays he goes to the temple. Usually he goes alone, although sometimes he is accompanied by other family members.

Nearing the temple, the streets grow more crowded. From the stalls on either side, hawkers call out their wares. Many sell the offerings that devotees take to the temple; others sell the objects that are used in household shrines. Ramachandran purchases a coconut and a packet of white camphor from the vendors that he frequents every week. He puts these into the small wicker basket that he carries, which already contains some bananas and bright red hibiscus that he picked from the garden behind his home.

As he approaches the temple gate, he leaves his sandals at the door and steps inside. Already he can hear the loud clanging of bells from within the sanctum. Repeating the name of his Goddess—"Mariamman, Mariamman, Mariamman"—he joins



(*panchamrita*) and sacred ash (vibhuti). Once cleaned and anointed, the image is then dressed in garments befitting its gender and station: a dhoti and shawl, or a sari or skirt and veil. It will then be further adorned with jewelry (bangles, necklaces, nose rings and a crown) depending upon the wealth that it has acquired over the years as gifts from devotees. Finally, it will be garlanded with flowers. This bathing and anointing ceremony is usually conducted in private. Public viewing is considered indiscreet, and invasive to the Deity. The image may only be seen by others when it is properly dressed and adorned. Few Westerners recognize that the manner in which Hindu sculptures are most often exhibited in museums, galleries and private collections both inside and outside India is considered disrespectful by many Hindus. The images may be beautiful in elemental form and design, but without their ritual apparel and adornment their display is thought inappropriate.

Hindus chant prayers and songs of praise to the Deity all during the ceremonies of preparation, as well as during the puja itself. Many of these prayers (*shlokas*) are derived from the most ancient of Hindu scriptures, the *Vedas*, and have been recited in this precise form for many thousands of years. Others were collected and/or written by sages and saints within the last two millennia. It is considered essential that *shlokas* be repeated precisely and with proper reverence. Hindus believe that the very name of a God or Goddess has magical properties, as do many other sacred words and verses. The cadence, quality, pitch and vibration of a voice may pierce through the illusion of the material world and speak directly to God. In fact, many texts state that the Absolute, Brahman, is pure sound. Most classical Indian

Sri Rangam Temple, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu: *A vendor sells camphor in small plastic packets that will be opened in the sanctum and lighted as invocations to the Divine. Each basket contains flowers, bananas, a coconut and betel leaf to be offered inside the temple.*

music is considered sacred. Fine musicians are treated as the heaven-born, even regarded as saints, for through the magic of their voices and instruments they enable the listener to experience darshan, pure communication with the Gods. The tonal purity of the bells ringing during a puja shatters the devotee's mundane train of thought and makes him or her directly receptive to the miracle of divine presence.

Divine Gifts

Hinduism revolves around the concept of reciprocity: by giving one receives and, in turn, one shows gratitude by giving. Both religion and hereditary society are based on this principle. Most if not all Hindu pujas involve expressions of thankfulness by the symbolic offering of gifts to the Deity, usually in the form of food and flowers. The type of offering depends on the financial ability of the devotee, as well as the climate, season and local tradition. Those living in wet, tropical areas might offer rice, bananas and fresh fruits, while those in drier environments may give breads or sweets made of wheat or millet, or simple pellets of sugar. People in North India prefer to give garlands of marigolds and roses, while in the South devotees offer more exotic flowers such as jasmine, tuberose and hibiscus. Lotuses are highly valued as sacred gifts everywhere in India. Flowers are used to adorn the image of the Deity while the food is placed in its close proximity.

many other devotees to encircle the central temple in a clockwise direction. Returning to the entrance, he pushes through the crowd to enter the temple itself. Inside it is dark and cool, filled with the thick, sweet smell of incense. Ramachandran joins the line of other male worshipers to the left of the inner sanctum. The women, wearing their brightest saris, with flowers in their hair, line up opposite him. Children are on both sides. He reaches up to ring a bell suspended from the stone ceiling. Its strong tone clears his brain of extraneous thought and allows him to focus his attention on the Deity. Craning his neck, he can just get a glimpse of the blackened stone image of the Goddess. She is dressed in a brilliant red sari, her neck covered with jewels and garlands of flowers, her head crowned with a diadem.

The priest comes down the line of devotees collecting their offerings and returns into the sanctum. A curtain is drawn across the shrine for a few minutes of eager anticipation. Then, amid the clamor of bells, it is opened. The image of Mariamman is radiantly beautiful to him, newly adorned with fresh flowers, including two of Ramachandran's bright red hibiscus. The priest waves a brass lamp lit with seven flames in a circular motion in front of the Goddess. Looking into the shrine, Ramachandran locks his eyes with those of the image: he has darshan with the Goddess. At that moment he is filled with a feeling of well-being, of centeredness and of belonging. His

world is in balance.

The priest then brings out a tray of lighted camphor. All the worshipers place their hands quickly into the cool flame before touching them to their closed eyelids, symbolically opening their souls to communion with the Divine. On the same tray are little mounds of white sacred ash and red vermilion powder. With the fourth finger of his right hand, Ramachandran puts a dot of each in the center of his forehead between his eyebrows, the ash symbolizing purification through worship and the red symbolizing Shakti, the power of the Goddess. Then each person's basket of offerings is returned, some of its contents remaining as a donation to the temple, the rest blessed by the Goddess to be shared by the devotees. Ramachandran will take this prashad back to his family, so that they may partake in Mariamman's blessing.

The purpose of his weekly temple visit is over, and Ramachandran must return home quickly. Once there, he changes out of his dhoti and shawl and puts on the black pants and white buttoned shirt of his work attire. After drinking only a glass of water, he mounts his bicycle to ride to the shop where all day he repairs the computers that are so essential to the maintenance of business in contemporary India. As he solders the memory boards of broken mainframe hardware, he is content in the memory of his link with his Goddess, and with the rituals that bring balance to his life.



During the puja rituals, the Deity is believed to symbolically consume the food. In doing so, his or her sacred energy seeps into the flowers and the remaining food, transforming them with vibrant divine power.

Many of the items donated to shrines are purchased in the markets just outside or even within the temple compound. Florists sell individual blooms and garlands of flowers strung together by hand, and fruit sellers provide coconuts, bananas and other produce. Confectioners display varieties of sweets and cakes, all to be given to the Gods. Other vendors peddle incense and camphor. Many cater primarily to the needs of household shrines, stocking their stalls with framed and unframed prints of painted portraits of the principle Deities being worshiped inside the temple, as well as those of many other Gods and Goddesses that might be of interest to devotees. Brass shops not only carry lamps, incense burners, trays and water vessels, but also various sizes of metal sculptures of popular Gods and Goddesses; other vendors sell the brocaded and embroidered costumes and miniature jewelry for these household images.

Certain occasions may require significant gifts to the Gods. The annual festival of one's patron Deity may be an auspicious time to give something extra to the temple or shrine. Rituals that herald important life-changing events, such as birth, coming of age or marriage, often involve the donation of presents to the family's temple. When a devotee prays for a specific boon from the Deity—for example, the healing of a disease, or success in a new project, or a raise in income—she or he promises that if the wish is granted, a gift will be given to the God or Goddess. If, then, the illness is cured, the enterprise successful, or the salary increased, the devotee will donate something special to the shrine or temple. The quality and value of the gift depends upon the financial capabilities of the donor. A common offering is a new garment for the image, often a cotton or silk sari or dhoti. Women may offer their own jewelry: glass, silver or gold bangles, gold or silver bracelets, anklets, earrings, necklaces or rings. Wealthy individuals might commission fine jewelry to be made, such as a crown or diadem, or perhaps even silver or gold coverings for a part of the body of the image. Terracotta (low-fired clay) sculptures are also given by the poor to community shrines, although rarely to large temples. Most often these sculptures are ordered from local potters to represent those animals (horses, cows or elephants) that tradition states are of particular interest to the Deity. They are believed by many to be transformed into their real counterparts in the spirit world for the Deity's own use.

Once the Deity is suitably prepared for worship, the puja begins. Fire is an essential part of all Hindu rituals. Lamps (*dipas*) are lighted during a puja and waved with the right hand in a clockwise fashion in front of the image, first around its head, then around its central portion and finally around its feet. The left hand of the priest or person conducting the puja usually holds a small bell that is rung continuously while the lamp is being waved. From ancient times, fire has been worshiped in India as the God Agni, and today remains a

primary symbol of divine energy. In offering the flame in front of the image, the devotee acknowledges the sacred supremacy of the God or Goddess. Various vegetable oils may be used in *dipas*, but the most auspicious fuel is ghee, or clarified butter. Most lamps are brass, and many are sculpted with sacred symbols relevant to the Deity being worshiped. Camphor, known locally as *karpura*, is processed from the pitch of the camphor tree. When lighted, it has the unique property of creating a bright, cool flame that leaves no ash. It is usually placed in a flat tray known as an arati. After being waved in front of the image, the arati is customarily brought close to the devotees so that they may pass their hands through the fire and then touch their eyelids or the tops of their heads with their fingertips. This action has great symbolic value. The bright, fragrant flame represents the brilliant presence of the Deity whose darshan is facilitated through the puja. Contact with the fire is believed to purify and elevate the devotee's soul, allowing it to merge with the magnificence of the Di-

vine; at the same time the energy of the Absolute unknowable Deity is transformed and channeled into a palpable connection with the devotee. The arati puja and the darshan (the moment of visually recognizing and being recognized by God) are the two most important acts in Hindu worship.

The arati is usually directly followed by giving water to the worshiper. A small brass container of holy water blessed by the Deity is brought out of the sanctum. A spoonful is poured into the cupped right hand of the devotee, who drinks it and then rubs the remaining drops through his or her hair, thereby melding both the inside and outside of the body with the essence of the Divine. It is again an acknowledgment of the complement of opposites, the two primary elements—fire (masculine) and water (feminine)—like the early morning prayers to the river and the rising sun.

According to ancient Indian philosophy, the human body is divided into seven vortexes of energy, called chakras, beginning at the base of

newly blessed food, called prashad. In the household, all the prashad will be consumed by family members. In the temple, some of it remains as payment to the priests who facilitate the rituals, while the remaining prashad is taken home and eaten. Hindus believe that the ingestion of prashad fills them with the divine energy of the Deity to whom they have prayed, in the same way that Christians believe that by partaking of the bread and wine in holy communion they accept the spirit of Christ into their bodies. While pujas may be made either before or after meals, depending upon family tradition, all food that is cooked in the home must first be symbolically offered to the Gods before it is eaten. In the strictly traditional home, the cook will never even taste the food while it is being prepared, as that would alter the purity of the offering. Consequently, all food cooked in these homes becomes prashad. The kitchen is therefore considered a sacred space that should not be violated by uncleanness or by impure actions, words or thoughts.

Madurai, Tamil Nadu: A teenage girl places flowers as the finishing touch on a sacred diagram that she has just drawn with colored rice flour on the ground in front of her family's front door. This morning the painting is especially colorful to honor a sacred festival. Some days it is an intricate design crafted only in white, but the girl prides herself on painting a different decoration every day of the year as part of her invocations to the Divine.



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II. From Shrine to Temple

Each temple in India is different: its architecture, decoration, size and contents are unique to its own history and specific purpose. Most are built upon sites that have been in worship for as long as anyone knows. The central image in many is primordial, a natural stone that has been viewed as a God or Goddess for millennia, like the Svayambhu Linga in the temple in the story of Vivek and Manika. The structures around these images have grown up over centuries through the contributions of grateful devotees.

A temple's growth is entirely based upon the Hindu concept of reciprocity. In contacting a God or Goddess in puja, a devotee's desires may be implicit, without a special request, or may include prayers for something specific, such as good employment, or increased wealth, or improved health. In either case, devotees who consequently experience good luck must share their fortune in acts of kindness and also in honoring the Deity to whom they have prayed. A greater fortune demands a bigger repayment. A large temple may well have begun as a shrine to a local *gramadevata* (village Deity). Today many temples are being built on the spots where *gramadevatas* have been worshiped for centuries. When a positive change happens in the village, gifts are given to the local shrine, which is most often associated with a tree.

In contemporary India, the economy of the burgeoning middle-class is improving rapidly. Many people have relatives that send them money from overseas; new technologies at home have created new jobs; better education engenders more employment choices. Whatever the source of improvement, the recipient must thank his or her

Deities with presents. Often the community will join together to give something to the shrine; they may raise money through subscription; or particularly fortunate individuals may make large donations on their own. Accordingly, a family may give money to the local shrine to erect a new platform or even a small building. Another family may commission a stone sculpture of the God or Goddess to be carved and placed in the shrine. Someone else may want his own *ishtadevata* to be honored by financing the building of a secondary shrine. The accoutrements of puja are improved. Large bells may be tied to the tree, fine arati plates and lamps given, and jewelry commissioned to adorn the sacred stones or the new images. Gradually, the wealth of the shrine grows and locked doors must be installed to protect the new objects from theft. The consequence of all this change is that the tenor of the shrine's atmosphere changes.

Decisions must then be made as to the care of the larger complex. Are there funds to employ a caretaker? Should the pujas continue to be conducted by non-brahmana *pujaris*, or should a brahmana priest be hired for the position? The answers to these questions may well alter the dynamics of the shrine. Many non-brahmana communities that have conducted their worship services according to their own traditions for centuries choose to change with the times, to modernize by employing brahmanas. The reasons are complex: brahmana priests have been trained since childhood in the intricate prescrip-

Sri Rangam Temple: Beneath one of the outer gates to a large temple, a street vendor sells garlands of flowers to be purchased as gifts for the Gods.

Vivek and Manika Pray for a Child

The entire city seems to be awake and on the move, even though it is only 7am. The streets are filled with activity and the cacophony of vendors and traffic. Vivek and Manika have finished their cups of coffee and are ready to go to the temple. Their marriage festivities were over just two weeks ago, and the new bride and groom have been advised that it would be auspicious to visit several important sacred sites before they settle down. They have already traveled by bus to five other temples in central southern India, but today is the most important: in this town is an ancient temple dedicated to an image of Siva renowned for His powers of granting fertility and successful childbirth.

Manika is reverentially dressed in her finest pink sari and gold jewelry, and Vivek wears a traditional white silk dhoti, his chest bare to expose the sacred thread that all brahmana men wear. As they walk down the wide avenue that approaches the temple, they buy a basket of offerings from one of the stalls and then stop to wash their hands and feet in the waters of the ancient stone pool that stands just to the left of the temple compound, sprinkling some over their heads to symbolize a bath in

the holy Ganges River. They hand over their sandals to a man who puts them in racks along with the hundreds of others already left that morning. Then they pass through massive doors under a towering stone structure filled with niches containing sculptures of the Gods and mythological figures.

They immediately notice a change in atmosphere. It is not quiet here either, but the intensity is different. There are no vehicles, no market stalls, just throngs of people going different directions and involved in many activities. First Manika and Vivek stop to put flowers on a large stone image of Siva's son Ganesha, the elephant-headed God who is Lord of Beginnings and Remover of Obstacles. It is appropriate to begin worship at the temple by honoring Him. Then they join the mass of people moving to the left in a wide, walled passageway that completely encircles the central temple. As they walk, they compose their minds to focus on the reason that they are here: to pray for pregnancy and a successful childbirth. Their attention is diverted by the many rooms that they pass, built into the enormous stone wall at their left. Some contain the sculpted carts and animal-shaped litters for carrying the processional





Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu: *Every morning this brahmana priest bathes this ancient stone Linga, the aniconic image of Siva, with several sacred substances, among them honey (shown here), sandalwood paste, milk and a mixture of mashed fruit. In performing this action he demonstrates his great reverence for God Siva.*

tions of rituals, underlining the implicit message that the pujas they conduct are more pleasing to the Gods; and broad social pressure suggests that brahmana superiority will improve the status of the community. (Brahmana priests are always male, organized in large temples into complex hierarchies. Occasionally, pujaris in non-brahmana shrines and temples are female, further complicating the choice.) Not all enlarging shrines choose to hire brahmana priests. Some continue to retain the services of their traditional *pujaris*. But usually the rituals conducted by these non-brahmana priests will be amended to fit the stature of the new surroundings.

If the good fortune of individuals or the entire community continues to increase, then architects and stone carvers may be hired to build a complete temple. The style of the temple is usually governed by that of local architecture, although recent growth in the influence of mass media and the popularity of certain historical and contemporary styles have resulted in new, eclectic Hindu temple architecture in India and abroad. Nevertheless, the modern trend simply continues an historical precedent: temples have always grown through the combined influences of reciprocal donations, traditional values and fashionable technology. The architecture of many of India's most important ancient temples is an eclectic blend of many regional styles.

Virtually all of India's temples have grown through this process: either gradually through the donations of grateful individuals and groups, or rapidly through the sponsorship of one powerful and wealthy person. Many of the most magnificent temples were built by royalty. For example, a king might create an enormous stone edifice

for two purposes: to demonstrate gratitude to his God for his position and to proclaim to his subjects his supreme sovereignty. Some of the finest temples recently constructed in India, including the Birla temple in Calcutta, were financed by the country's new rich.

A new temple most often stands directly on a spot that has been a focus of worship by the local community for generations. In some cases a building will be constructed to incorporate a sacred tree. More often the requirements of a large building will mean that the new central shrine is situated alongside or even some distance from the tree. Special rituals are carefully enacted to cleanse and purify the new area before construction begins. The architecture of the new building will be carefully planned so that its proportions and alignment both cater to the demands of ritual and facilitate the needs of worship. Decisions must be made as to whether to continue using the natural stones or sculpted images that have been the focus of pujas, or to carve or cast sculptures. The form of a new image may portray the iconography of a pan-Indian God or Goddess, or may accentuate the personality of the local Deity. If the ancient image is to be installed in the new temple, then special ceremonies are enacted to ensure its proper transference to the new sanctum. The svayambhu Linga worshiped by Vivek and Manika was originally established in this manner when the Siva temple was built many centuries ago. Even after the primary images have been transferred from an older sacred site to a new temple, unofficial pujas generally continue at the original spot. Sacred trees, like the Naga tree, remain in worship inside temple compounds throughout India.

If a new image is to be consecrated, then elaborately prescribed rituals must be followed precisely to transfer the energy of the Deity from its original source. The final act in the consecration of any new image, whether in household, shrine or temple, is the ritual opening of the eyes, which facilitates darshan, enabling the Deity to see as well as be seen. At the last moment, eyes may be chiseled in, or painted on, or added in metal or stone before the life force is breathed into the

images of the Deities; others hold offices for the temple administrators; some are the kitchens for cooking the food offered to the Gods; and still others are stalls for the temple elephant, and for the cows that provide milk for the pujas. Everywhere there is activity. The elephant, its head colorfully painted with vines and lotuses, reaches out its trunk to bless passersby in return for offerings of coins. A group of women squat in a circle singing songs. Children run back and forth among the devotees playing a game of tag. Pilgrims are stretched out asleep among the carved columns of a roofed platform. The smell of spices wafts from a large group sitting together eating rice and lentils off plates made from large green banana leaves.

As Vivek and Manika turn a corner they come upon an ancient tree, its branches tied with bundles of cloth offerings and prayers written on bits of paper in a tiny flowing script. Beneath it are stone sculptures of snakes, some with human bodies: the Nagas, ancient Gods of healing and fertility. Manika opens a small tin she has been carrying in her purse and smears sandalwood paste upon the sculptures, praying as she

does so for the health of their firstborn child.

Finally, after walking almost a quarter mile around the enclosure, Vivek and Manika return to their starting point and enter the second gate. Inside, although still crowded, the atmosphere is more intense, focused on prayer. Again they turn left along a corridor that encircles the central temple. They are progressively drawing closer, ritually preparing themselves for their encounter with the great God. The edge of this passageway is arrayed with a whole series of small shrines, some with images of Siva, many to Gods and Goddesses secondary to His worship, and others to Siva's saints. Devotees are stopping at shrines that are important to them, lighting camphor and placing flowers on the images and, occasionally, coins at their feet. Although the young couple are intent on their goal of puja to the central image of Siva, they still stop to acknowledge each shrine as they pass, folding their hands together in respect and touching them to their foreheads.

At last they are back to enter the third and final gate. Directly in front of them is a huge plinth upon which sits a gigantic

image (*prana pratishtha*), bringing it full divine consciousness. Now the Deity is fully present in the image, to be bathed, dressed, adorned and honored in the manner befitting a God or Goddess.

Occasionally a temple will be built on an entirely new spot. Over the past two centuries, as the Indian population has increased by a thousand percent, many previously undeveloped areas have been settled. Industrialization created new factory towns; and increased commerce and changes in government engendered new cities and suburbs. All of these communities require shrines, and many have sponsored the construction of temples. The process of selecting the site for a temple is complicated; it must be chosen with great care. Astrologers and seers are consulted, and the history and legends of the property assessed. There should be no demons or ghosts associated with the site and any negativity must be removed through complex purification rituals. If possible, the temple should be near water, preferably a pond, river or stream. If not, then water must be accessible, either by well or reservoir. A temple is usually aligned on an east-west axis so that the entrance and all of the subsidiary gates, where applicable, are directly in front of the inner sanctum. Ancient scriptures govern the ground plan of the temple and the position of all the subsidiary buildings to conform to the delineations of a sacred geometric diagram, or mandala. This large square mandala is divided into a grid of many smaller squares, each associated with positions of the stars, sun, moon and planets, and with the Deities related to these heavenly bodies. The sanctum is placed at the center of the mandala—all other buildings, walls and entrance ways revolve around it. The temple compound is thus a microcosm, a conscious replica of the conceptual universe. It functions not only as a seat of the Gods, but also as a metaphysical means of transcending the exterior worlds and entering the center, visualized as the matrix of creation. Consequent-

Haridwar, Uttar Pradesh: Outside almost every temple are market stalls selling the objects required for worship either within the temple or in household shrines. Here a vendor of brass sells containers for sacred substances, lamps, incense burners, cymbals, bells, chains, frames and sculptures of Deities. (Below) Devotees draw blessings from the flame that has been passed before the Deity.

ly, the entire temple plan is intended to assist the progression of the devotee from mundane existence to divine realization.

The Garbagriha

The inner sanctum of the temple is called the *garbagriha*, literally translated as "chamber of the womb." It holds within its dark and unadorned recesses the potency of the central image, the absolute power of the God or Goddess. No one but a qualified priest is allowed to enter here—to do so might adulterate the purity of the power. Even the priests must undergo rituals of purification each time they wish to enter this womb. All other devotees approach as close to the image as possible for darshan with the Deity. In some temples they are allowed to touch the base of the image or the feet of the Divine, believing that by doing so they absorb the God's radiance through their fingertips. Non-Hindus are not permitted to enter the innermost areas of many of the most important temples, as it is feared that by inappropriate thoughts or gestures they might desecrate the image. Some temples, such as the Jagannath Temple in Puri, are considered so pure that no non-Hindus may enter the entire compound.

The path to the inner sanctum is intentionally long in order to properly prepare the devotee for an encounter with the Deity. The process is achieved through ritual circumambulations (*pradakshina*) in which the individual walks around the center several times,

granite sculpture of the bull Nandi, the beloved mount of Lord Siva. He faces away from them and directly towards the open door of the main temple. This interior building is a large edifice, its walls inlaid with numerous niches, each holding an image of a God or Goddess. In the foreground is a huge pillared porch with a relatively simple roof; but behind that is an elaborate tower that rises in sculpted tiers to resemble the peak of a fantastic mountain. Vivek and Manika are overcome with a sense of awe. As they walk around this building, they, like the crowds around them, are quiet, concentrating on their prayers. They stop for a minute to touch a simple stone projection on the back wall of the temple, the spot that is nearest to the central image. They believe they can feel the close power of Siva. When the newlyweds return to Nandi's shrine, they begin to climb the steps up into the temple's entrance hall. Inside it is cool, the light filtered from windows on either side. Both the pillars and the ceiling they support are elaborately carved with images of Siva, His wife Parvati and their sons Ganesha and Karttikeya, along with many other Gods, demigods and mythical beings.

Ahead of them is the sanctum sanctorum, the heart and soul of the entire temple complex. The crowd pushes them



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Clockwise from left: Every morning of the year, millions of Hindus, like these women in Varanasi, rise early to bathe in a nearby river or pond and then pray to the rising sun. Khajuraho Temple in Madhya Pradesh, exemplifies the northern style of temple architecture, and Brihadishwara Temple in Tamil Nadu exemplifies the southern style.

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symbolically shedding more of the mundane world with each pass. In large compounds this is achieved through a series of up to five concentric corridors—the nearer to the central temple, the more sacred the corridor. The final pradakshina is made in a windowless passage that surrounds the chamber of the womb. All existence is focused upon the sacred. All of the five senses are then activated as the devotee reaches the inner sanctum: bells ring and priests chant; lamps and arati are lighted; incense and ghee burn; the heat of the fire is felt with one's fingers; and prashad is eaten. For the devout, a sixth sense is also activated: the sense of the presence of the Divine.

The position of the womb chamber within the temple is usually marked by a tower or dome, its fluidity of line and refined decoration contrasting directly with the dark simplicity of the inner chamber. Hinduism, in common with many other religions, has always associated mountain peaks with sacred purity and deems them the abode of the Gods. Siva and his wife Parvati are believed to live on Mount Kailasa in the Himalayas. Many Hindu saints have achieved

enlightenment in these mountains, and a pilgrimage trek around the sacred peaks is believed to bring great spiritual merit. The towers of many temples are built to resemble stylized mountains reminiscent of these peaks. Many are elaborately carved in stages from ground to spire, some beginning with animals and the mundane activities of man on the lower levels, sacred symbols and celestial figures at the middle range, and Gods and Goddesses at the top. The capstone or flag on the peak is directly above the primary image, accentuating by its height and by the progressive arrangement of its levels, the same process of sacred transformation.

Styles of temple architecture vary greatly throughout the subcontinent, and the contrast is particularly pronounced between the north and south. The tower, or *shikhara*, above a northern Indian temple is usually tall, its verticality continuing the niches and tiers of the projecting walls in a fluid line from base to peak. A South Indian temple is generally a flatter structure with a proportionately smaller pyramidal tower (*vimana*) to represent the cosmic mountain. The entrance gates to most South Indian temples, however, are enormous, elaborately sculpted structures with barrel-vaulted caps; they are visible from great distances to entice the devotee to prayer. In contrast, northern Indian temple gateways are usually relatively understated, their *shikharas* drawing the devotee's attention.

The difference between north and south is further underlined by a comparison of the numbers of remaining ancient temples. Islam spread into India in the eighth century and over the next eleven centuries countless Hindu temples were either destroyed in the name of Allah or fell into disuse and decay through lack of sufficient patronage, particularly in the north where Muslim influence had its strongest impact. Few ancient temple complexes remain there. Urban temples were forced into smaller spaces, often sharing buildings with businesses and living quarters; while small rural temples either were unthreatened or were torn down and rebuilt in later years. The exception was among isolated kingdoms in the central plateau and on the East coast, and those of powerful maharajahs in Western India who made political and economic liaisons with Muslim rulers. Consequently, the contemporary northern states of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat retain many magnificent temples. In contrast, most South Indian temples were protected from widespread destruction by Muslim invaders by their geographic boundaries and the consolidated strength of strong Hindu kingdoms. The greatest number and largest of India's temple complexes are in the South, and many have continued to grow steadily throughout history. For example, the huge temple to Vishnu in Sri Rangan, first constructed in the tenth century, has been added to and changed in every century since then. The sculpted superstructure of its seventh outer gateway was completed in 1987.

tightly together, and so that their offerings are not spilled, they hold them high above their heads as they join the line to enter the inner shrine. As they pass over the threshold into this final room, a brahmana priest takes their offerings and asks their names, their community and the stars under which they were born. Inside, the walls are plain and very dark, encrusted with centuries of the blackened smoke from countless lamps. The strong smell of incense and congested air permeates everything. The noise of chanting and bells fills their ears. There is a sense of oneness with the rest of the

crowd of devotees as they all press forward, straining their necks to see into the dark recess of the small central chamber. Several priests are inside. One holds a lighted lamp and circles it around and around the stone image of God Siva. It is a Linga, a pillar shape that for Hindus represents this supreme Deity. This Linga is *svayambhu*, not carved by any hand of man, but naturally formed by God himself. It has been worshiped here for thousands of years, long before the temple was built. Siva's devotees believe that this Linga is radiant with power, vibrant with the ability to grant any wish. A second

brahmana priest rings a bell, while a third, the one that had taken the basket of offerings from Vivek, places this and others at the Linga's base and then proceeds to chant prayers to God, reciting the names, communities and stars of each of the devotees. Manika and Vivek feel thrilled by their sense of the presence and magnificence of Siva. Silently they ask Him to give them a healthy child; and they feel sure that their prayers will be answered. One priest brings out the arati, and they put their hands into the flame and put white ash upon their foreheads. The other priest returns to them their basket of

prashad. Then they are pushed by the crowd out a side door and into the courtyard next to the temple. Feeling blessed, they silently return straight through each of the gates and out onto the still-busy street. These newlyweds believe that their lives have just been changed. They have passed through the many stages of preparation to meet God. They have made their prayers, had Siva's darshan and received His blessing. Now they can take the long train ride back to their home to begin their new lives together, content in the knowledge that they will create a new generation to carry on their family traditions.

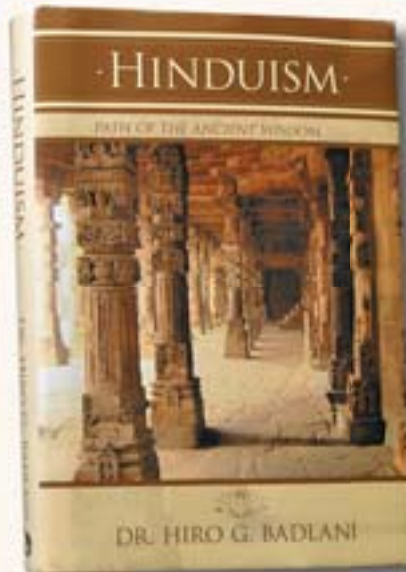
A Hindu Sourcebook

BY TARA KATIR, WASHINGTON, USA

THIS BOOK BY DR. HIRO G. BADLANI IS NOT a scholarly treatise. Rather, it is a non-academic book written by the retired ophthalmologist for two audiences: the youthful Hindu diaspora, and non-Hindus who are interested in learning about Hinduism. Organized in short chapters, just four to nine pages, the book's topics include *Vedas*, *Upnishads*, code of conduct, consciousness, soul, detachment and Goddesses, as well as introductions to the related religions of Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism.

Badlani offers a discussion of male dominance in ancient Hindu society and women's roles today. Elsewhere, to illustrate the strength of Hinduism, he quotes American philosopher J. B. Pratt: "The reason for the immortality of the Vedic religion of Hinduism is that while retaining its spiritual identity, it has been changing its outward form in accordance with the demands of the time; and particularly it is the only religion which has been able to meet the challenges of science, which governs the thought and life of the modern age."

Badlani encourages Hindu youth to hold onto their faith and "adopt these spiritual



values in daily activities and fully enrich their lives." He explains, "Religion, dharma, is basically like a classroom, a school, or a university, where we get the instruction for the moral and virtuous pedagogy. Ultimately, however, it becomes our responsibility to learn and understand these spiritual teachings properly and put them into use in everyday living." Dr. Badlani's mini-encyclopedia will be a valuable addition to the library of young Hindus throughout the diaspora.

HINDUISM, PATH OF THE ANCIENT WISDOM, ISBN 978-0-595-70183-4 IUNIVERSE, INC., 1663 LIBERTY DRIVE, BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA 47403, USA, 378 PAGES, \$35.95, WWW.IUNIVERSE.COM

An Encyclopedia of Saivism

SWAMI PARMESHWARANAND'S THREE-volume exploration of the world of Saivism is a much more complex presentation than the introductory book on Hinduism reviewed above. This tour de force will appeal to those wanting to delve into the intricacies of Saivite philosophy, history and personalities.

The 117 articles run from six pages for standard topics, such as "Ganas of Siva," to more than two dozen pages for "Epigraphical Evidence of Siva Cults and Practices." The text is based on scriptures, the writings of saints, modern archeology and scholarship. The author is particularly adept at explaining the complex systems of philosophers such as Abhinavagupta of Kashmir Saivism. He explores monistic forms of Saivism, such as Abhinavagupta's, and dualist forms, such as Meykandar's, but tends to offer a dualist



interpretation on key points.

Topics include, Spanda, Absolute Consciousness, Saktipata, *Saiva Agamas* and Nandikesvara's Advaita Saivism. In the entry on "Soul and Siva," Swami writes, "It is because in His inmost essence God Siva is Love that whatever perfection He possesses is a form of love, and that whatever action He performs with respect to souls is a form of grace and springs from His loving care for His creatures. God is Infinite Light, Love and Intelligence."

The hardback volumes have indexes, but lack other standard helps for the reader, such as a table of contents and page headers to indicate the topic under discussion. Overall, this is a useful resource on Saivism.

ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF THE SAIVISM, ISBN-81-7625-427-4 (SET) SARUP AND SONS, 4740/23, ANSARI ROAD, DARYA GANJ, NEW DELHI, 110002, INDIA. E-MAIL: SARUPANDSONSIN@HOTMAIL.COM, 3 VOLUMES, 895 PGS, RS 3200

An American in Gandhi's India

AT THE TURN OF THE 19TH CENTURY, A young American Quaker from Philadelphia named Samuel Evans Stokes Jr. set out for India. His goal was to work in a leper home run by the Leprosy Mission in India. Stokes became a well-known Christian missionary who, after careful study of Hindu philosophy, converted to Hinduism in 1932 with his entire family. Asha Sharma, Samuel's granddaughter, chronicles his unique story in *An American in Gandhi's India, the Biography of Satyanand Stokes*.

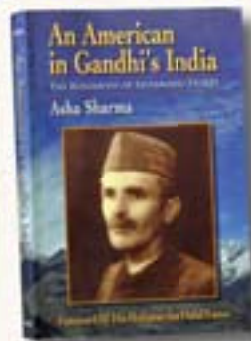
For twenty-five years, Satyanand (the name he received in India) wrote weekly letters from India to his mother in Philadelphia. In time, the *Harmony Hall Letters*, a book of the compiled correspondence, was gifted to Asha by her grandmother. Thus began her journey to document her grandfather's remarkable philosophical and physical journey from America to Kotgarh, in the Simla Hills of Himachal Pradesh, India.

Satyanand was the only American member of the Indian National Congress, the nationalist movement headed by Mahatma Gandhi to free India of British rule. He was also the only American to be arrested by the British, who jailed him for six months on sedition charges.

Satyanand's efforts to improve the plight of farmers in the Simla hills ultimately freed them from a system of forced labor. An avid farmer himself, he studied fruit tree propagation while on a trip home to Philadelphia and returned to India with saplings of the Red Delicious apple, still today an key crop in Himachal Pradesh.

In the time leading up to his conversion, he wrote, "I am not one of those who take religion so lightly that I can repeat with my lips that to which my spiritual experience does not give assent. I have felt of recent years that I could be honestly a Hindu, whereas I have not for a long time felt I had the right to call myself a Christian." The conversion itself, described in chapter 20 onwards, was not without controversy, for while Hindus had become Christians, Stokes was the first American Christian to become a Hindu.

AN AMERICAN IN GANDHI'S INDIA, BY ASHA SHARMA, ISBN 978-0-253-21990-9 INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 607 NORTH MORTON STREET, BLOOMINGTON, IN 47404, USA, 373 PGS, \$21.95



BOOK EXCERPT

Hindu Studies: Warring with Words

Misunderstanding of key terms confuses today's reporting and research on Hinduism

BY KOENRAAD ELST

In the introduction to his book, Decolonizing the Hindu Mind, Belgian scholar Koenraad Elst argues that Western-based reporters and scholars fail to recognize biased and misleading terminology used by their Indian counterparts. We excerpt here his discussion of particularly problematic terms.



TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE THOUGHT ANIMATING A SOCIAL, cultural and political movement, one must simply listen and read what its acknowledged spokesmen have to say. The need of the hour is to get acquainted with what Hindu revivalists are really saying and to restore objectivity to the discussion. Objectivity has been under attack on two fronts. One is the "postmodern" form of Marxism (quite powerful in American universities), which denies the very notion of objective knowledge, assumes that knowledge is conditioned by one's social belonging, and insists that "all research in the social sciences has a political agenda." In practice, this means that once an author has been identified as belonging to the wrong interest group, his arguments are ipso facto wrong or vitiated. In a large part of the academic publications, this position is implicit in their way of foregoing any serious evaluation of arguments formulated by Hindu revivalists, as if the identification of the propounder of the argument as a "Hindu fundamentalist" were sufficient to put his arguments beyond the pale of rational discourse. Thus, the Hindu litany of grievances against the inequalities imposed on Hinduism by the Indian state (a major issue) is commonly only mentioned as an object of ridicule, never of proper investigation.

The second problem is that many India-watchers who do believe in the principle of objectivity have nonetheless published books and papers on the present topic which suffer serious lapses from the normal scholarly standards. The exacting standards of objectivity are obviously a permanent challenge to scholars in any field, but this field, or at least its present-day state of the art, presents some peculiar problems. In some cases, the bias may be in the mind of the India-watcher, but the overriding problem is that even scholars and journalists who do try to be objective frequently rely on Indian sources which have considerable standing but are nonetheless far from objective. There is, apparently, an assumption of cultural solidarity in which Western India watchers regard their Indian colleagues, "our men in India," as representatives of enlightened modernity who stand above the ongoing conflicts between the native barbarians. This, in spite of the conspicuous fact that many Indian academics use very partisan language when addressing the issue of Hindu revivalism.

However, we shall show that the very basics of this research are highly problematic: numerous presumably non-partisan sources are tainted by a partisan involvement which outsiders tend to ignore or

misunderstand, and even the terminology which conditions the whole discourse on India's religious conflict is often unclear and sometimes the object of deliberate manipulation. My intention is to avoid these traps and clear away the cobwebs at the only entrance to a real understanding of Hindu revivalism, viz. to let the primary sources speak.

What follows is a brief glossary of the typical terminology encountered in the primary and secondary literature on Hindu revivalism. A number of these terms represent false trails, theories or rhetoric which contribute nothing to our understanding of Hindu revivalism—this in spite of their tremendous popularity as explanation models in circles with little knowledge of the primary material. Others are very ordinary terms whose meaning suddenly becomes problematic when used in the context of "Hindu revivalism."

HINDU REVIVALISM

The focus of this study is most aptly termed Hindu revivalism, a broad trend in nineteenth- and twentieth-century India which seeks to revive Hinduism after a benumbing near-millennium of political, ideological and psychological subjection to Islamic and Western hegemony. Hindu revivalism is a many-pronged attempt to ensure the survival of Hinduism by integrating the gains of modernity in Hindu civilization (in that sense, it is of course

not a revival of anything ancient in unchanged form), as well as by intellectually and politically fighting off the perceived threats posed by Islam, Christianity and a string of secular ideologies, of which Marxism is the most articulate.

The Hindu revivalist movement perceives itself as the cultural chapter of India's decolonization. It tries to free the Indians from the colonial condition at the mental and cultural level, to complete the process of political and economic decolonization. The need for "reviving" Hinduism springs from the fact that the said hostile ideologies (mostly Islam) have managed to eliminate Hinduism physically in certain geographical parts and social segments of India, and also (mostly the Western ideologies) to neutralize the Hindu spirit among many nominal Hindus.

HINDU FUNDAMENTALISM

It should already be clear that the movement under consideration cannot be called "Hindu fundamentalism." The reason is not that, as Hindu revivalists commonly argue, "a Hindu cannot be a fundamentalist because the concept of fundamentalism is specific to the Biblical-Koranic tradition." The role of "scripture" is, indeed, not exactly the same in Hinduism as in the "religions of the Book," among other reasons, because there is a plurality of Hindu scriptures. Rather, the key point is that that segment of Hindu opinion which we are considering in the present study does not belong to this scripturalist tendency, even though it may embellish its manifestoes with an occasional (and often creatively reinterpreted) Vedic quotation. Most certainly, it is "not fundamentalist in the sense of being scripturalist." Fundamentalist movements invariably oppose the lukewarm and compromising tendencies within their own religion; such is not the case at all in Hindu revivalism, which focuses on confronting



THOMAS KELLY

non-Hindu doctrines or social forces and uniting all Hindus. *Fundamentalism*, in the true sense of the word, is not in evidence in the Hindu revivalist movement.

COMMUNALISM

One of the most frequently used terms in India—watching is *communalism*, a term unknown to most Westerners. Its roots lie in the British colonial policy of taking “communities” as the relevant units in recruitment or in the allotment of seats in representative assemblies. Originally, the term had no pejorative connotation.

Today, *communalism* is one of those labels allotted exclusively to people who reject it; it is a term of abuse. This distortion of an otherwise well-defined and useful term started in the 1920s, when Congress leaders took to using it for (i.e., against) Hindu organizations, even though the latter opposed communal electorates and recruitment quota which the Congress had endorsed. Even when Congress became a party to the Partition of India on a communal basis (Pakistan for Muslims, India for non-Muslims), which these Hindu organizations kept on opposing, Congress kept on denouncing the latter as “Hindu communalists.”

To justify this shift in meaning, a symmetry was assumed between minority organizations which favored the communal principle and Hindu organizations which opposed it, in the sense that both defended the perceived interests of their own community. The definition of the term was changed. The effective meaning of communalism in post-Partition India is explicated by the Marxist historian Bipan Chandra as “the belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion they have, as a result, common social, political and economic interests.” This definition is generally accepted and used, e.g., by Saral Jhingran: “By *communalism* is meant the assertion that the secular interests of a group of persons are coextensive with its religious identity.”

This definition, is, unfortunately, quite wrong. It does not satisfy the defining criterion of a definition, viz. that its semantic domain be coterminous with the phenomenon it seeks to define. When Bipan Chandra and Saral Jhingran talk about “communalism,” they certainly include issues like the agitation against cow-slaughter, the Hindu and Muslim agitations concerning the temple or mosque in

Hindu revival: *The ever-increasing attendance at the quadrennial Kumbha Melas, such as here at Haridwar in 1998, are just one sign of Hinduism's resurgence after a millennium of foreign oppression*

Ayodhya, and the *Satanic Verses* affair. These examples involve not “common economic, political, social and cultural interests,” but purely religious concerns—that the birth-place of Rama or the fair name of the Prophet is being violated. Such controversies are not covered by Bipan Chandra’s definition of “communalism.”

The fact that nowadays the label “communalist” is systematically applied to people who never describe themselves as such, and most of whom go out of their way to deny that they are “communalists,” should caution scholars to handle it with utmost care. It may be legitimate to sit down and collect evidence for the thesis that “the Hindu nationalists are communalists,” but it is not

legitimate, at least not from the viewpoint of scholarly or journalistic duty, to routinely replace their chosen self description with the externally imposed label “communalist.”

HINDU NATIONALISM

Most Hindu revivalists do accept the term *Hindu nationalist*. After the Ayodhya-related excitement, with its media exaggerations, died down, the more responsible Western media decided to use this term when discussing the RSS and BJP. It should be kept in mind that in India, *nationalism* doesn’t have the negative connotations which it has in Western intellectual circles. On the contrary, the term is hal- lowed by its association with the freedom movement. For the people concerned, it simply means “love of one’s country,” and in all other respects its meaning can vary. Another term which Hindu national- ists themselves often use, and which is now effectively a synonym of

“Hindu nationalism,” is *Hindutva*, “Hindu-ness.” It is distinct from “Hinduism,” in that it designates the “Hindu nation” rather than “Hindu religion.” The “Hindu nation” is conceived as including Indians belonging to semi-Hindu religions like Sikhism and Bud-

dhism (whose sacred sites associated with the founders lie in India), but whether it also includes Indian Muslims and Christians is a point of disagreement within the movement.

THE HINDU RIGHT

In Leftist writings, it is not uncommon to see Hindu revivalism, particularly its political section, described as “the Hindu Right.” Though there is nothing pejorative in the term *right* in itself (on the contrary, for ages this was the “right” side, while the left side was associated with abnormality and evil), ever since the French Revolution it has become associated with the reactionary defenders of social injustice, the moribund forces of the past. In practice, the very word *rightist* carries an inherent leftist bias. The parties journalistically described as “rightist” (British Tories, German Christian-Democrats, American Republicans, etc.) very rarely call themselves that; only “extreme-rightist” parties do that. Most parties to which the metonymic term *rightist* is applied identify themselves by means of descriptive terms, like *conservative*.

The term *Hindu Right* only applies if an extreme Leftist viewpoint

is assumed, as is effectively the case for numerous Indian Hindutva critics: only from that angle is Hindu nationalism consistently found to one’s right. To the extent that Hindu revivalism rejects the Marxist reduction of history to economic factors—a refusal which Marxism construes as a camouflage for support to the status-quo in economic power equations—Hindu revivalism is, of course, non-Marxist and, if you want, non-Left.

But the decisive objection against the term *Hindu Right* is that the people concerned will not accept it. In fact, the BJS explicitly described itself as “centrist,” e.g.: “As a centrist party, the Jana Sangh has been subjected to attacks both from the extreme right as well as the extreme left.” One workable measure of objectivity and neutrality in news reading and scholarship is whether people and groups are classified with terms in which they recognize themselves. When we apply this simple yardstick of objectivity to the available literature on Hindu revivalism, we find most of it wanting.

MACAULAYISM

Macaulayism is named after the British administrator Thomas Babington Macaulay, who in 1835 initiated an education policy designed to create a class of people Indian in skin color but British in every other respect. “Macaulayites” are those Indians who have interiorized the colonial ideology of the “White Man’s Burden” (as Rudyard Kipling called it in a famous poem): the Europeans had to come and liberate the natives, “half devil and half child,” from their native culture, which consisted only of ignorance, superstition and the concomitant social evils; and after this liberation from themselves, these Indians became a kind of honorary Whites.

Macaulay’s policy was implemented and became a resounding success. The pre-Macaulayan vernacular system of education was destroyed—even though British surveys had found it more effective and more democratic than Britain’s then-existing education system. A Hindu revivalist diagnosis is given by Ram Swarup: “Above all, there appeared a class of Hindu-hating Hindus who knew all the bad things about Hinduism. Earlier invaders ruled through the sword. The British ruled through Indology. The British took over our education and taught us to look at ourselves through their eyes. They created a class Indian in blood and color, but anti-Hindu in its intellectual and emotional orientation. This is the biggest problem rising India faces—the problem of self-alienated Hindus.”

It is this class of Hindu-born “Macaulayites” which has inherited the mantle of the colonial ruling class. Its most conspicuous representative was the first Prime Minister of free India, Jawaharlal Nehru, then sometimes nicknamed “India’s last Viceroy,” and recently evaluated as “the English gentleman who came to ruin India.” Reviewer Joseph Shattan describes Jawaharlal’s father, Motilal Nehru, as “in Macaulay’s famous phrase, ‘Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’ There being no vacancies at Eton, in 1905 he packed 15-year-old Jawaharlal off to Harrow, determined that the boy grow up a proper English gentleman. He succeeded beyond his wildest dreams; and years later, at Cambridge, Jawaharlal wrote his father asking permission to transfer to

Oxford: ‘Cambridge is becoming too full of Indians.’”

Hindu commentator S.R. Goel, in *Hindu and Hinduism, Manipulation of Meanings*, observes: “One has to read Nehru’s writings and speeches, and evaluate his policies from a Hindu point of view, to realize that, so far as Hindus and Hinduism are concerned, he was a combined embodiment of all the imperialist ideologies—Islam, Christianity, White Man’s Burden and communism—that have flooded this country in the wake of foreign invasions or interventions.” This class of mostly Hindu-born Macaulayites has shaped the institutions of post-1947 India, including its de facto state ideology, secularism.

SECULARISM

In Europe, its continent of origin, secularism is not an ideology in its own right, it is only a practical arrangement between Church and State, viz. their separation. Secularism means that the State shall not in any way promote any religion, whether by propagating it through official channels, by discriminating in favor of its votaries, or by imposing its commandments through the rule of law. In a broader sense, secularism, as a cultural tendency, means that religion is “kept in its place,” if not discarded altogether, in order to let people decide their destinies on the basis of purely human and this-worldly considerations.

In India, the Constitution of 1950 affirms the secular character of the Republic implicitly, but not until 1976 did the Constitution explicitly affirm that India is a “secular” state. Surprisingly, this non-involvement of religion and specifically of Hinduism in the Indian polity is not much of a concern to Hindu revivalists. The reason may simply be that they have

more pressing concerns, while some lip-service to Hinduism in the Constitution would not make much difference to the flourishing of Hinduism in civil society anyway. The anger of Hindu revivalists is directed not against “secularism” in its proper meaning but against what it calls “pseudo-secularism”—the alleged practice of favoritism toward non-Hindus under the cover of “secularism.”

European secularists wanted man to be emancipated from the mind control exerted by the dogmatic and irrational belief systems of authoritarian religious establishments, a situation which did not obtain in India at all. To be sure, religion in the sense of belief in supernatural interventions was and is widespread in India. Moreover, a religious conception of political authority also prevailed; kings were enthroned with Brahminical rituals. But Hindu states always supported religious pluralism; Hindu tradition never stifled debate, never stood in the way of science, and in its early stage even incorporated and encouraged it.



NO CREDIT

Thomas Macaulay (1800-1859) *As a member of the Supreme Council of India, he was instrumental in getting English adopted as the medium of instruction in higher education*

“We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”

—BARON THOMAS MACAULAY, 1835



HARROW SCHOOL



ARCHIVES



ZUMA PRESS

Hindu India has had no history of book-burning, of executing heretics or confining dissidents to lunatic asylums. The Buddha could preach his heterodox doctrine till his old age without ever being persecuted. As Dutch indologist Sjoerd de Vries writes: "In Indian society, an amazing tolerance vis-a-vis people of unusual opinions has existed for ages.... Only very few instances are known where conflicts have erupted for the sake of religion. Not until the advent of Islam did India get acquainted with religious persecution."

PSEUDO-SECULARISM

In their unease about the semantic manipulation of *secularism*, Hindu revivalists question the very use of this term. Seeing that the policies actually carried out by the secularists are not in conformity with the dictionary meaning of *secularism*, they allege that India is controlled by "pseudo-secularists." Some of them sum it up in one simplistic sentence: "*Secularism* means being anti-Hindu." They profess not to reject the principle of secularism, meaning "genuine secularism" or "positive secularism," and accuse the establishment and the other parties of "pseudo-secularism," meaning "discrimination against Hindus justified in the name of secularism."

Ever since Jawaharlal Nehru gave it currency, the term *secularism* has been very popular in India. Most parties and politicians call themselves secular. Even Muslim activists, whose counterparts in Turkey or Egypt denounce secularism as a demonic betrayal of Islam, call themselves secularists.

This general enthusiasm for *secularism* in itself should indicate that the meaning of the term has undergone a drastic change in India, and that it is irresponsible to use the term as if it had its established Western meaning (which most India-watchers do). Just as the English word *deception* has a radically different meaning from its French look-alike *déception* (which means disappointment), the British-English word *secularism* differs radically in meaning from its Indian-English look-alike *secularism*. A professional interpreter who translates *déception* as *deception* is incompetent, and an India-watcher who translates the Indian-English term *secularism* into standard English as *secularism* has a similar problem.

The self-described "secularism" of the Indian elite is a special case meriting closer inspection. Secularism in India is certainly not a neutral position, as Western India-watchers tend to assume. In fact, it is one of the warring parties in India's religious conflict. This

The roles of Nehru: (left to right) India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru as a schoolboy in Harrow, England; conferring with Gandhi and Sardar Patel in 1946; in Paris in 1951

is a rather consequential insight, for it means that reliance on the presumed neutral Indian sources describing themselves as secularist (a reliance which pervades the entire non-Indian literature on the present topic) is actually a reliance on the version of one of the warring parties, which is the very last thing to do in scholarship.

MARXISM

In allotting political labels to persons, I intend to be more circumspect than the Marxists, who systematically label all Hindu revivalists as RSS men if not Hindu fascists. Of course, I don't pretend to know every author's personal involvement, and allowance should be made for changes in people's commitment. So, the safest criterion is simply to go by the presence or absence of a conspicuous Marxist viewpoint or conceptual framework in an author's writings, then proceed to label that particular argument—rather than the author himself—as "Marxist." In a number of cases, however, the Marxist label is certified by Marxist sources. Thus, Romila Thapar and R. S. Sharma are quoted at some length as representatives of Indian Marxist thought in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*.

To Marx, according to this same dictionary, Hinduism "was the ideology of an oppressive and outworn society, and he shared the distaste of most Europeans for its more lurid features.... he was as sceptical as his Hindu followers were to be of any notion of a Hindu 'golden age' of the past."

Marx upheld the colonial view that India was not a country properly speaking, merely a stretch of land with a meek conglomerate of peoples passively waiting for the next conqueror. For him, the question was not whether it was right to colonize India, merely whether colonization by Britain was preferable (and in his view, it was) to colonization by the Turks or the Czar.

Marx's Indian followers have remained true to his view. They reject the very concept of India as a national unit and only accept India's unity and integrity to the extent that they consider it strategically useful—e.g., in 1970–75, when they sincerely believed that they were about to come to power in Delhi. In an interview in *Le Monde*, Romila Thapar cheerfully predicted that India won't be able to stay

together. CPM Politburo member Sitaram Yechury calls India a "multinational country" with "many nationalities."

After the Soviet implosion, many an Indian Marxist, or Left-talking opportunist has switched to free-market liberalism but remained a determined Macaulayite and secularist. Indeed, the intense polarization for and against Hindutva in the early 1990s is partly due to a regrouping of Leftist forces on the cultural front after they found that their fortunes on the socioeconomic front were down, as observed by G. Jain: "Deprived of the old legitimacy which the non-existent but effectively advertised success of the Soviet Union and China conferred on them, leftist intellectuals must now hang on desperately to Nehru. Secularism ... and not socialism has to be their battle cry." The effect on international opinion is that "the 'secularist' and 'anti-Hindu-communist' platform assures them the support of not only the Muslims at home and abroad but, interestingly enough, of a lot of people in the West," Jain concludes.

At the academic level, at least, this is very much the situation: Indian Marxists are welcomed in American seminars as privileged commentators on "Hindu communalism." It is ironic and disturbing that a movement which still swears by Lenin—whose October 1917 coup d'état deposed the first democratic Russian Parliament—and Stalin is hailed in Western universities as the guardian of a civil polity against the encroaching barbarism of Hindu revivalism.

MAJORITARIANISM

Majoritarianism is the position that a majority has the right to determine the face of a country, whether in symbolic respects or in actual legislation. It is in effect a pejorative term for democracy, especially democracy in its unalloyed "one man, one vote" form, in which a majority can take decisions without bothering about the religious background of the decision's supporters or opponents.

One curb on unalloyed "majoritarian" democracy could consist in veto powers conceded to smaller units (though this means that a minority can impose its will on the majority, which obviously detracts from the "democratic" character of the system). This is what David Ludden refers to in his book *Making India Hindu* with his criticism of BJP majoritarianism: "As a majoritarian movement, Hindu nationalism defines the Indian nation as a whole and seeks to displace and remove alternative, pluralistic definitions." A "pluralistic" definition seems to imply a recognition of subnationalities or other units below the level of the nation.

This critique of majoritarianism intrinsically presupposes a communalist perspective: the nation is not one, is not a single unit which can take political decisions, but it is a composite of communities, one of which may be the majority, but each of which has its own sovereignty. The citizen does not participate in the decision-making process as just a citizen, but as a citizen qualified by his membership of a subnationality. Moreover, in the present debate, it is minorities defined by religion which are accepted as legitimate contenders for the status of a "minority" entitled to "get justice."

In secular countries, there may be subnationalities defined by religion or language (and that only for very limited purposes), but it is unconstitutional and, in fact, unthinkable that a proposal of law in France, the US or any other secular country were to be subjected to the approval or disapproval of groups defined by



Karl Marx: India's 1983 stamp honors the man who (along with Engels) founded modern communism

religious identity. Thus, no matter how sinful the Catholic community may consider the legalization of abortion, there is no question of a modern government giving representatives of the Catholic community a veto right against a democratically enacted law permitting abortion, nor even the right to have a separate minority law applying to Catholics alone. In those countries, a citizen is simply a citizen, and his adherence to a majority or minority religion is strictly ignored. That is real secularism.

That very policy, accepted as a matter of course in Western secular democracies, is precisely what Ludden describes as the majoritarian program of the Hindu nationalists: to treat "the Indian nation as a whole," in particular, to have a Common Civil Code which applies to all citizens regardless of religion—replacing the present "pluralistic" Civil Code, which differs according to religion. By contrast, the "alternative, pluralistic definitions" envisaged by Ludden introduce the notion of separate communities as relatively sovereign building-blocks of the nation. But that is exactly what the British in India used to call the "communal" principle. This example of a controversial term

may serve to illustrate how easily outside observers get entangled in the intricacies of India's "communal" problem; how they lose their neutrality even in the stage when terms are defined; and how they may even end up on the side which they imagine they are criticizing, i.e., "communalism."

CONCLUSION

I caution the reader that certain commonly held opinions about India and Hindu revivalism are just that—opinions. Views on a large phenomenon like Hindu revivalism naturally stretch across the whole opinion spectrum, but those which dominate the international media and the channels likely to have influenced my readership are almost uniformly hostile, sometimes ferociously hostile. About Hindu revivalism we may say what an earlier researcher has said about the Middle-Eastern Druze religious community, viz. that they "were judged almost entirely in the light of sources written by their adversaries; hence many misconceptions about them persist to this day." This complaint is also heard from the people directly concerned here, the Hindu revivalists themselves.

DR. KOENRAAD ELST was born in Leuven, Belgium, on August 7, 1959, into a Flemish (Dutch-speaking Belgian) Catholic family. During a stay at the Benares Hindu University, he discovered India's communal problem and wrote his first book about the budding Ayodhya conflict. He has frequently returned to India to study various aspects of its ethno-religio-political configuration and interviewed Hindu and other leaders and thinkers. Decolonizing the Hindu Mind is available at www.amazon.com.

It is unconstitutional and in fact unthinkable that a proposal of law in France, the US or any other secular country were to be subjected to the approval or disapproval of groups defined by religious identity.

The Hindu Chaplain

Our faith's tolerant beliefs and powerful practices enable us to minister effectively to all in need

BY SWAMI SARVAANANDA

A chaplain is an ordained clergy or layperson who performs a religious ministry in a public institution among people of diverse faiths. Chaplains serve today in the armies of most countries (including India), in hospitals, hospices, prisons, police and fire departments, even corporations. They are skilled in offering spiritual counseling and advice suited to a person's beliefs and needs. At moments of life-changing crisis, their responsibilities extend to family, friends, caregivers, rescue personnel and even bystanders. In her essay, Swami Sarvaananda speaks of her own chaplaincy training and experience.



IN 2001, I WAS BLESSED TO BECOME THE FIRST HINDU CHAPLAIN in the United States, certified by the Association of Professional Chaplains. I am a disciple of the late Swami Satchidananda and was initiated by him as a sannyasin and an Integral Yoga Minister in 1977. Before entering chaplaincy studies at the University of Virginia in 1998, I lived, studied and served at Satchidananda Ashram, Yogaville, Virginia. I worked as an adjunct chaplain at the university for three years, then joined the Hospice of the Piedmont in Charlottesville, Virginia, where I now hold a full-time chaplain supervisor position (see sidebar p. 58). When not at the hospice, I still live, serve and study at Yogaville. It is my hope that after reading my story, other Hindus will be inspired to take up this wonderful service to our fellow humans.

For many reasons, I believe that Hindus are especially well suited for the chaplaincy. Certain Hindu practices can be exceptionally effective in dealing with patient and family needs. Many Hindu writings—the *Upanishads*, *Vedas* and the epics such as the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, as well as Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, the *Tirukural* and the *Bhagavad Gita*—guide us on how to care for ourselves and for others, as well as how to lead a better life. Additionally, many Hindu chaplains have studied under masters who have conveyed to us their deep understandings of the teachings in ways that we could easily understand and apply.

What Is a Chaplain?

A chaplain is a skilled listener and facilitator who leads an individual, and sometimes a whole family or other group, through the process of dealing with strife, making plans and moving forward. All chaplains are skilled in the basics of counseling, such as active listening, theological reflection, case study techniques, record keeping and more. Many are certified counselors. Most also have additional training in crisis intervention, stress management, conflict mediation, disaster response and more. Chaplains are bound by the same rules of patient confidentiality as doctors.

The professional chaplain understands and practices his or her own faith and is also trained in the general theological beliefs and needs of many religions, faith traditions, belief and cultural systems around the world. Generally, a chaplain has a college degree in a

related field, seminary training, experience in the field of ministry and a recommendation from his or her faith tradition.

Chaplains serve their patients and the patients' families by finding out what gives the family hope and learning the family's cultural, religious and spiritual traditions. Using those traditions, the chaplain supports the family through whatever situation they are encountering. Chaplains do not impose their own views; an evangelical approach to gain a convert is contrary to the chaplain's professional code of ethics. Rather, they have the knowledge and skills to support the person's own beliefs. Indeed, chaplains often assist the client in redefining his or her beliefs when under stress.

Chaplains use the tools of various faith traditions, such as prayer, meditation and relaxation, to offer support, and they are skilled in assisting anyone, regardless of beliefs. We use the term "faith tradition" as an alternative to "religion," but both mean the same thing. If desired by the patient, the chaplain will contact faith leaders from the patient's own church, synagogue or temple. When a family does not have a faith group, the chaplain may conduct memorial services or funerals. Chaplains

can act as patient advocates, serve on ethics committees and assist families with values questions.

Chaplains often serve in health agencies, such as hospitals, nursing facilities, homes for the aged, assisted living facilities, rehabilitation centers, hospice services and AIDS homes. They serve in the military, with police, rescue squads, firefighters, disaster teams and with the American Red Cross and equivalent service agencies. Chaplains can be found in various work places—the circus, NASCAR, the court system and schools, especially when a critical event occurs. Everywhere people have been in need—the Virginia Tech shooting, Hurricane Katrina, 9/11—chaplains were there. Chaplains are looked upon as leaders in their community.

Many chaplains focus on grief, bereavement and crisis issues. Almost all will provide debriefing, lead workshops, facilitate grief groups and give lectures to community agencies. Their experience and their presence are a welcome influence in any chaotic situation.

Certification

To be certified by a national board, a chaplain must be a minister, monk or nun endorsed by his or her own religion or faith tradition and must have the equivalent of 72 graduate hours in theology and related topics. The candidate must have at least four credits of study in Clinical Pastoral Education, which is defined as "interfaith professional education for ministry" and includes at least 800 hours of direct patient care. Case studies and theology papers regarding patient care are required. These are reviewed by a committee of peers, who send their recommendation to the national office. Once certified, the chaplain must keep current by completing yearly educational requirements and occasional peer reviews.

As a Hindu, much of my religious and spiritual study came directly from learned masters and from the experience of living in an ashram. Therefore, the graduate theological equivalencies for certification were met in my case through documenting the study at the feet of my guru, Swami Satchidananda, and through study with many sages from various traditions, including the visits and talks at Yogaville by Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TO-

DAY. I entered the chaplaincy program already having a PhD in education, and this degree went a long way toward meeting the academic requirements. I completed the University of Virginia's program in Clinical Pastoral Education in 2000.

Hindu Beliefs and Practices In the Chaplaincy

Hindu beliefs and practices uniquely prepare a chaplain for serving people in distress. Pranayama, hatha yoga, meditation, vegetarianism and the study of raja and *jnana* yoga prepare the body and mind. Bhakti yoga keeps one in touch with a higher power through devotion and maintains prayer and faith in one's life. Hinduism's emphasis on service enables the practitioner to meet others' needs, before one's own. In short, a disciplined, devoted and dedicated Hindu can serve others well without depleting his or her own resources.

The challenge for all chaplains is to successfully minister to those of other faiths. Belief in the Hindu teaching, "Truth is One, Paths are Many," enables a chaplain to assist each patient with full respect for—and from the perspective of—the patient's own beliefs and traditions. Various professional studies and experience in the field have demonstrated to me that, when discussing one's own beliefs with those who follow other paths, the essential key is to present the concepts in an easily understood manner. When a patient shows interest in my beliefs, I build on the foundation of his or her own world view to present a few Hindu concepts, but I do not approach such discussions as an opportunity to change anyone's beliefs.

The *Rig Veda* states, *Ekam sat, vipraha bahudha vadanti*, "Truth is one; seers express it in many ways." This fundamental Hindu principle is a cornerstone for good chaplaincy care. The chaplain respects religious differences while acknowledging that there is an essence of sameness, believing that truth, joy, love and light can be found on any path. One analogy that works well with patients and families is to note that when we go to a restaurant, we all go to be nourished. One orders spaghetti, another salad. We are all fed according to our interest, desire and needs. Thus each has found a path that works for them. Understanding "where people are coming from" is essential in chaplaincy.

A belief in karma is shared by many people. In counseling, the understanding that each action has a reaction and that somehow, someday, balance will be found makes it easier to understand anger and find acceptance in a situation one hasn't caused directly—such as the impending death of a loved one. This view is helpful when assisting families in processing and coming to terms with what is happening. Understanding karma helps people to have greater acceptance and even to surrender to what unfolds. If something is happening, there is always a reason behind it. It becomes the person's duty to deal with the present and not resort to pondering the "what ifs" of the past that might have changed the present. Instead, plans can be made, action taken and all can move forward.

No practice is so easily applicable to patients or families as pranayama, breath control, for everyone breathes to the end. Deep, full breaths taken slowly relax and invigorate the entire system. Learning to use the three-part breath as a regular pattern enables anyone to breathe more fully and brings in more oxygen. Alternate nostril



Dangerous work: Chaplains serve not only in health care facilities but also with the army, police and fire departments

breathing regulates and relaxes; combined with affirmations—"Breathe in the health, breathe out the illness"—it allows the person to visualize and support healing. Other breathing techniques, if taught gently, can also aid the patient and family.

One can even assist in regulating another's breathing pattern. Matching your breathing to that of a patient who is breathing either too slowly or too fast, and then slowly changing our breath to the recommended pattern can bring even the non-awake patient to the correct breath. I have seen this technique work, if only briefly, even with patients on breathing machines and those who are near death. Of course, if a person is healthy enough, a more extensive practice of breathing techniques will bring great assistance in the healing process. In addition to using pranayama themselves with patients, chaplains can also teach staff, volunteers and the family to practice and to use it with the sick.

Prayer, common to every religion, can be described as one's chance to talk to God, meditation as a time to become deeply silent and listen for an answer and contemplation as a time to think about how to apply what one heard to one's daily life. This approach is invaluable in dealing with changes in life, in any faith tradition. Today these practices are also referred to as "centering oneself," "visualizing positive thoughts," "finding one's inner path" and similar phrasing.

Finally, the practice of inner stillness—just being, not doing—is essential in assisting patients and families as they deal with turbulent emotions. Inner stillness, a great healing force, brings outer stillness.

On Regaining and Keeping Health

In my hospice chaplaincy work, I deal with terminally ill patients and their families. Recovery is usually not an option. But in most other forms of chaplain work, recovery is very much the goal. In that work, I have found that people must first be taught that true health is more than a condition of the body.



My explanation is: "When you are in perfect health, you will be happy everywhere, relaxed everywhere—always at ease and in peace, within and without. You hate no one, dislike none. Total love, universal love emanates from within. There is no tension anywhere, no stress or friction. These are the signs of real health. A healthy person doesn't hurt anyone. You are not afraid. You don't have to fear and you don't cause fear. A healthy person emits a loving, pure vibration."

Swami Satchidananda taught us, "The human body is a temple. Keep it strong and supple; treat it gently. Live in a way that makes your body light and healthy. The body is a vehicle of divine expression, as are all forms of creation. To become a good instrument of the divine, maintain your health. Have an easeful body, a peaceful mind and a useful life."

With this approach, we can face any situation and still be, from a broader perspective, a healthy person. Sharing this with patients and families enables them to understand that true health is more than healing from a particular disease. On the practical side, a health crisis can awaken people to the value of a lifestyle which includes a vegetarian diet, not eating in excess, no smoking, drinking or recreational drugs, plenty of exercise, relaxation and attention to reducing stress. Combined with a positive attitude, including service to others, these beliefs and practices can make a great impact on the lives of all patients and family members.

Community Outreach

Chaplains encounter many opportunities to represent their faith in a multi-faith environment, both in a hospital or hospice and in the broader community. I am often asked to participate on panels or give talks on Hindu beliefs and practices, especially as they pertain to health care. Hospitals are now publishing information for staff on essential practices and beliefs of various traditions, as the patient population has become more diverse. Those planning community and facility memorial services frequently seek persons to represent various faiths. As a chaplain, I am regularly asked to participate. In 2007-2008, I had the honor of being on the Planning Committee for the 2008 National Conference of the Association of Professional Chaplains chairing the Spiritual Needs subcommittee. We devel-

Military chaplains: In 2005, John Reid, Secretary of State for Defence (third from left) welcomed five new chaplains into the UK Armed Forces: (left to right) Mandeep Kau (Sikh), David Wilks (Christian), Imam Asim Hafiz (Muslim), Krishan Attri (Hindu) and Dr. Sunil Kariyakarawana (Buddhist).

oped an interfaith service and other thematic services with prayers from many faiths.

Conclusion

Hindu chaplains are needed in health facilities, in prisons, in the military and as part of disaster and emergency response teams. If you are a practicing Hindu who has the temperament to serve others in such situations, chaplaincy may be a choice for you, either as a volunteer or as a professional. Volunteer chaplains usually serve only members of their own faith community within the above-mentioned settings. They should have the endorsement of a temple or ashram, and a background in counselling is very helpful. Specialized training may be required to serve, even as a volunteer, in a larger organization.

One obstacle to Hindus becoming chaplains has been the lack of an equivalent certification to that of a religious seminary in the West that issues degrees as authoritative as those from a major university. For Hindus, most study is within the person's family, in the temple and at the feet of a guru. This type of learning—which has served Hinduism well through the last several thousand years—has been hard to document to match the seminary model. The good news is that a few of us in the health care field are working to gain recognition for the traditional training methods of our faith and others.

If you have a college degree in a related field, and are active in faith practices and in your temple, you may well be qualified for chaplaincy training. You may call your local hospital where pastoral education is offered, contact the Association of Professional Chaplains at www.professionalchaplains.org or e-mail me, Swami Sarvaananda, at swsarva@yogaville.org for further information.

In the Course of a Chaplain's Day...

CHAPLAINCY WORK IN THE emergency services is invariably intense, dealing with accidents, disasters and crimes, while a military chaplain may deal with anything from a soldier's fraying marriage to the horrors of the battlefield. Most of my own work, though, has involved assisting patients in a hospice, a facility that provides palliative care for the terminally ill in a home-like environment. It is a quiet, often contemplative, setting in which reflection on higher things comes naturally. The following stories (slightly altered to preserve confidentiality) are drawn from my experience.

In one case, a dying woman's 12-year-old granddaughter arrived at the hospice from across the country. The grandmother, unable to speak or even open her eyes, frightened the girl when she grasped her hand and would not let go. With the help of other therapists, the chaplain was able to calm the parents and allay the child's fear. For the next three days, until the grandmother died, the chaplain stayed close, meeting the family's needs as they arose.

Another patient, we'll call him the Commodore, had helped develop the submarine program for the United States. At the time the chaplain met him, he could barely hold a cup. He had traveled around the world, examined many cultures and faith traditions and concluded that there is no life after death. The

chaplain and the Commodore spent many hours over many months discussing philosophy, questioning beliefs and having fun challenging one another. One hour before he died, he said, "Pray for me, chaplain." The request was in recognition of their friendship and did not signal a change in his beliefs. The chaplain responded, "Thank you. It has been an honor to discuss and share with you. I will indeed pray for all of us." Later, the chaplain was honored to officiate at his funeral in Arlington National Cemetery.

One 95-year-old patient at the hospice had been an enthusiastic golfer. The chaplain had met her three years earlier, when she could walk, go out with others on town trips and smoke on the porch of her retirement home. On what was to be the last day of her life, she lay in bed unable to move; but still her mind was sharp. She asked the chaplain to play "Imagine Golf." The lady verbally played five holes at her favorite course, describing the layout, picking the club and narrating her shot. On the fifth hole she got to the green, took her last breath and died before sinking the putt.

Shortly after Hurricane Katrina, a mentally challenged 42-year-old man and his dying mother arrived at his sister's home in Virginia. Floodwaters forced him and others out of the facility where they were living and onto the streets. Abandoned, he walked home to his terminally ill mother. With no

help from the overwhelmed rescue workers, the two took her car and somehow drove all the way to Virginia. The daughter called the hospice for help. The team placed the son in a facility, which was difficult, as his records had been lost in the flood. As soon as the mother knew her son was cared for, she died within hours.

One chaplain encountered a horrific traffic accident on her way home from work. The couple in the crashed car had been fighting; the husband was killed. The chaplain offered her help to the emergency personnel, who asked her to move the wife to a quiet spot and try to calm her down. After some time, the wife did pull herself together, and asked the chaplain to pray with her over her husband's body. She then removed his wedding ring and accompanied his body to the emergency room. The chaplain, her job done, went back to her car.

It is the nature of a chaplain's work to deal with everyone impacted by a crisis. On a daily basis, I help people face their inevitable transition, help the survivors come to terms with their grief, handle the mundane matters that accompany death and find a way to move the living ahead in their lives.

Helping the dying: Hospice Home, where Swami Sarvaananda serves, assists terminally ill patients achieve a peaceful transition; (inset) sharing a silent moment





Are Brains Wired for Enlightenment?

A stroke shut down half of a brain scientist's brain. Cornered in the other half, she plunged into a samadhi-like state of love, bliss and insight

IN 1996, DR. JILL BOLTE TAYLOR, THEN 37, was immersed in a successful career at Harvard and a long history of brain research. She was a neuroanatomist with a passionate drive. Her brother suffers from schizophrenia, and she dedicated her life to the study of brain disorders, trying to understand why he, unlike her, could not share the common perception of the world that most people call "reality."

Dr. Taylor's research focused on investigating the chemicals that cells use to communicate with other cells. Her team tried to identify the biological differences between the brains of individuals diagnosed as normal and the brains of those diagnosed with

schizophrenia, schizoaffective or similar disorders.

To identify what makes brains different, one needs, well, brains—specimens to dissect, compare and catalog. Those who have relatives with mental disorders and ardently hope for a cure are the ones whom the scientists seek out, because they can authorize the donation of organs when their relatives die.

In the mid-1990s, Harvard's "Brain Bank" had barely enough donations to keep research going. Wanting to help, Dr. Taylor embarked on a mission that, she says, gave her life a lot of meaning. It included the peculiar task of asking people for their brains, while politely assuring them she was not in

a hurry.

Music, she learned, could break the ice. Carrying her guitar around the country on weekends, the "singing scientist" crooned compositions of her own: *Oh, I am a brain banker / Banking brains is what I do / I am a brain banker / Asking for a deposit from you! // When you are heaven bound / your brain can hang around / To help humanity find the key / to this thing we call insanity.*

She led a purposeful life, successful and happy—when on the morning of December 10, 1996, an artery in her brain exploded, propelling her into unexplored inner worlds and nearly an untimely death.

To be or not to be? (left) Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor holds a human brain with its spinal cord attached. To her, our "real self" is an all-pervasive consciousness that manifests through the brain.

A "Stroke of Insight"

Dr. Taylor describes the morning of the stroke and the approximate time of events:

07:00 "I woke up to a pounding, caustic pain behind my left eye. It was very unusual for me to experience pain, so I just started my normal routine. I got up and went on to exercise on my full-body exercise machine. When I looked at my hands grasping the handles, they seemed such primitive claws. 'That's very peculiar,' I thought. I looked down at my body to find myself to be a weird-looking creature." Dr. Taylor was not identifying with her body anymore. "My consciousness had shifted away from my normal perception of reality. I was not the person having the experience. Instead, I was witnessing myself in the third person."

She continued as if it were just a passing disarray. "With my headache getting worse, I walked across my living room, realizing that my movements were rigid and very deliberate." Because her external perceptions were contracted and confused, she reached for the inside of herself. There, she was astonished at what her mind could sense. She was no longer a single organism alone in the room. She had become an agglomerate of life. "I was momentarily privy to a precise understanding of how hard the fifty trillion cells in my brain and body were working. I heard the orders that made one muscle contract, the other one relax, working in perfect unison. I witnessed in awe as my nervous system calculated and recalculated every angle. I was each of my cells, each molecule of the thriving sea inside my skin."

07:20 On her way to take a shower, balancing her weight against the bathroom wall, Dr. Taylor realized she could no longer identify the boundaries of her body. "I could not define where I began and where I ended, because the atoms and the molecules of my arm blended with the atoms and molecules of the wall. All I could detect was pure energy everywhere."

Asking herself what was wrong, she received no answer, no thought. The question itself faded. Then the mental chatter we always hear in our minds—the verbal decision-making process, the dialogue of our thoughts—was gone. Her mind was a still lake, a vast and silent void.

Silencing the mind flow and stilling thoughts to a perfect quiescence is a common goal in meditation. Hinduism and Buddhism describe this as a spiritually desirable state. Yogis use pranayama (breathing techniques), body postures, *japa* (repetition

of mantras) and efforts of will to gradually achieve it. In Dr. Taylor's case, her brain took her there in a flash. She thought she had lost herself somewhere along the way. Who was she, if not the voice in her head? But even though she was not thinking in verbal constructs, she was still fully aware. "I was conscious in my mind. I was fully present, and now was the only moment. At first I was shocked to find myself in a silent mind. But then, almost immediately I was captivated by the magnificence of energy around me. I felt enormous, expansive. I felt at one with all energy, and it was beautiful."

"Without my left brain available to identify or define me, my consciousness ventured unfettered into the peaceful bliss of my divine right mind."

Human brains have two hemispheres, completely separate except at the *corpus callosum* at their base. Scientists understand that our personal identity is defined entirely in the left lobe of our brain, while the right lobe has very different functions, different thoughts, different priorities and even a different way of processing information. Dr. Taylor's left-lobe stroke was affecting the home of the ego, that which in Sanskrit is called *ahamkara*, "I-maker," man's finitizing principle. Without it, as she puts it, she was no longer I, but we.

The hemorrhage was drowning the neurons that civilized humans are most familiar with, those in the left hemisphere. There we store all of our opinions, rearranging them to form new ones. In our intellectualized modern life, the aggregate of our memories and opinions is a common way to define ourselves, thus its connection to the ego. The left side analyzes, ponders, categorizes and measures the immense amount of information it receives from the senses and from the right brain. It thinks in language and words, linearly chaining facts and conclusions. It remembers the past and speculates about the future. It connects humans to the external world, remembers to pick up the laundry on the way home and responds to our given name. It makes us solid individuals, separate from the whole.

Dr. Taylor was cast into a very different area of her mind. With the left hemisphere offline, she was free from the clutches of the intellectual mind and experienced her right hemisphere fully. It had never been off—actually, it predominates in babies, but remains obscured throughout adult life. In the right

brain, only the present exists; there is no past and no future. Information in the form of energy streams simultaneously from all senses, exploding into an enormous collage of what a moment looks, feels, tastes like. The right lobe thinks in pictures, abstractions, kinesthesia and physiological input. It is not judgmental; nor does it understand limits and separateness. It is about oneness, harmony and relating everything in a vast, intuitive understanding. Lost in that realm, Dr. Taylor was enraptured by the silence, the clarity of her consciousness and the bliss. But she could still be reached by bouts of severe pain.

Suddenly, in a spasm, her left hemisphere gathered enough resources to urge, "This is not normal. I am in danger." But that was all it said. Unable to think of what to do next, she drifted back into right-hemisphere consciousness. A pristine detachment from

the world emerged in her. "All stress was gone. I felt lighter in my body. All my relationships in the external world and their pressures ceased to be. Imagine what it feels like to lose 37 years of emotional baggage! I felt peace and euphoria." And with no sense of time, her newly found freedom seemed to last forever.

08:00 Untethered, she realized her body was an extraordinary, but temporary, home. "In the wisdom of my dementia, I understood that this body was, by the magnificence of its design, a precious and fragile gift. It was clear to me that it functioned like a portal through which the energy of who I am can manifest here. I wondered how I could have spent so many years in this construct of life and never realize I was just visiting."

With effort, she dressed for work. But faced with a paralyzed arm, she finally understood the situation. "I'm having a stroke!"—immediately followed by, "Wow, this is so cool!" For a brain scientist, studying her mind from the inside was the ultimate opportunity. Conscious enough in her waning left lobe to know she needed care, she went to call for help. But between each number she dialed, her consciousness expanded into heavenly bliss and overpowering tranquility, making it laboriously challenging to remember what she was trying to do—or which number was next.

09:15 She was lost in an existence of love and expansiveness, of color and energy. She felt atoms and molecules in a dance of swirling light, connecting her to all beings. But while she waded in bliss, an intense pain gripped her body in an irreconcilable



dichotomy. Dr. Taylor was enticed by the allure of surrendering to it all, and letting go of life. "A piece of me yearned to be released from captivity. Providentially, in spite of this unrelenting temptation, something inside of me remained committed to orchestrating my rescue." Finally, she managed to call her workplace, reaching a colleague who recognized her voice.

In the ambulance on the way to Massachusetts General Hospital, humbled by her condition, she curled up into a fetal ball. Still acutely aware, she remembers feeling "just like a balloon with the last bit of air blowing out of this vulnerable container. I felt my energy lift; I felt my spirit surrender."

At the hospital, her condition was stabilized by the medics. Waking up, she was shocked to still be alive, but remained in a state of bittersweet altered consciousness. Sensory stimulation was painfully amplified. Light burned like wildfire and sounds disintegrated into chaos; while at the same time a harmonious sea of silent peace flooded her nervous system. She was unable to worry. All she could do was to be in an eternal now.

She describes soaring as a being with no boundaries, expanding far beyond her body. "I was like a genie just liberated from her bottle. I remember thinking I would never be able to squeeze the enormity of myself back inside this tiny little body. I was one with the vastness of the universe." Three-dimensional space and time were nonexistent. She remained in a state of pure being, of unfettered consciousness and constant bliss. Any Hindu might wonder if this was the yogi's *sat-chit-ananda*, "existence-consciousness-bliss."

People, she discovered, could bring good energy or take it away. She was oblivious to the meaning of words but could understand the intention behind them. In a touch, she could feel the love—or disdain—of any nurse or relative. Though mentally disabled, she

was not unintelligent, only injured.

Trying to identify her state, she wondered if it was the Buddhist's nirvana. She reasoned, if she was alive and had found nirvana, then everyone else could, too. That was something worth living for. "I pictured a world filled with beautiful, peaceful, compassionate, loving people who knew they could come to this area of their minds at any time. They could purposely choose to step to the right hemisphere and find this peace. I realized what a tremendous gift this experience could be, and that motivated me to recover." After two weeks, a surgeon removed a golfball-sized blood clot from Jill's brain. It took her eight years to regain her normal faculties. It was a spectacular and rare recovery, aided by the unrelenting care of her mother, Gladys Gilman, for whose persistence, love and respect in helping her heal Jill spares no praise.

A New Life

Slowly a different person emerged from the cocoon of the stroke patient Dr. Taylor had been. She had to re-learn things much like a baby. Rebuilding her mind was an enormous task, but as a mature adult, she could watch over the process and make decisions.

When we are born, both hemispheres are equal, Dr. Taylor told HINDUISM TODAY. The left hemisphere begins to change rapidly as we develop an analytical intellect, while the right hemisphere stays approximately within its original frame.

When a thought or an activity is performed repeatedly, the brain readjusts neurons to form a highway on which that impulse can travel with the least expenditure of energy. Synapses, as the connection between neurons are called, line up in a chain of minimum effort and maximized performance. In our brain, connections reflect our habits and patterns. That is why familiar thoughts are so much easier to reevaluate than new con-

cepts; that is why we can mechanically perform complex tasks such as driving or talking.

But with many of her synapses gone, Dr. Taylor was free to consciously choose to not rebuild some of her old mental bridges. She loved to now realize she was a fluid beam of energy, not an organic object. She loved to experience being one with the universe and with everything—and everyone. Most of all, she loved the deep inner peace that flooded the core of her being.

One uneasy doubt tinted her enthusiastic dedication to recovering, which she explains by quoting peace activist Marianne Williamson, "Could I rejoin the rat race without becoming a rat again?" Dr. Taylor pondered, "Could I value money without hooking into to neurological loops of lack, greed and selfishness? Could I regain my position in the world while retaining compassion and a perception of equality among all people? Frankly, I would not want to lose touch with my *authentic* self. What would be the price to pay to be considered normal?"

It was essential to maintain the dominance of the right brain in areas it performs better than the left. In her quest, Dr. Taylor painstakingly worked out a way to never let go of her beautiful, right-brain new world. She consciously avoided certain places in the mind where impatience, worry, criticism or unkindness live. Anytime her awareness drifted there, she consciously stepped over to her now-familiar right side, where compassion and a subjective sense of time make things very different. With new neurological pathways, she says, she began rediscovering the world with childlike curiosity and joy.

Under-used, the circuitry of her ego never regained its full influence. Still, she assiduously tends her "mind's garden," setting aside a day every week for her authentic self—a silent day of right-brain consciousness. And she also nourishes it with music, guitar-playing and stained glass art. She finds it most importantly, though, to constantly arbitrate between the two sides within. She might, for instance, inwardly address her worrying left mind, enunciating that though efforts to alert her of real danger is welcome, anxious thoughts are not needed and can stop—thank you very much!

Unexpected Fame

On the road to her recovery, Dr. Jill Taylor rebuilt her career as a scientist. She resumed lecturing even before she could understand addition and subtraction again. Though she can no longer vivisection any living creature, she became ever more fascinated with the brain. Today she works with the Indiana Uni-



Strands of energy: The human brain has 100,000,000,000,000 connections between neurons, called synapses, constantly firing with electric and chemical impulses like these ones. It is the physical structure of thoughts, physiological functions and sensorial processing.

versity School of Medicine and is a national spokesperson for the Harvard Brain Tissue Resource Center.

Dr. Taylor wrote a book recounting her experiences, *A Stroke of Insight* (Viking, New York, 184 pages). It is an intimately personal tale, not a medical dissertation on recovery. The last two chapters discuss how to tap into the potential of the right brain. She nearly deleted the material from the manuscript, afraid that it sounded too much like metaphysics and too little like science, with instructions like "our desire for peace must be stronger than our attachment to the ego." Feeling brave, she decided to publish it anyway, hoping her experience will help others.

"Unfortunately, as a society, we tend to not teach our children to tend carefully to the garden of their minds. Thoughts run rampant and redundant," she explains, underlying the need for simple weeding. Because we are never taught to identify our inner conflicting opposites, we tend to think we are ourselves conflicted. "Thanks to my stroke, I have learned I have the power to stop thinking about events that have occurred in the past by consciously aligning myself with the present." It is a decision she says she has to make a thousand times a day.

An irresistible wave of change swept through her life in January 2008 after she shared her journey with a select group at an event called TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design), an annual conference which uses the motto "ideas worth spreading." The presentation was so engaging that the audience of scientists, politicians and intellectuals gave her a standing ovation. It was soon posted on the Internet, where it became an instant and unexpected sensation: 250,000 people saw it within the first 24 hours (www.ted.com/talks/view/id/229).

Suddenly, Dr. Taylor became famous in a way she had never imagined. A simple airplane trip would have people approaching her to shyly express appreciation. She was invited to give an interview on Oprah,

America's gateway to popular recognition, and the video of her lecture was posted on Oprah's website. *Time* magazine chose her as one of the 100 most influential people in the world for 2008, and *The New York Times* published an article on her experiences entitled "Superhighway to Bliss."

Judging by the content of those articles, most of the interest has been medical: people want to hear from a person who recovered so completely from a serious brain incident. Her story is not typical of stroke victims; left-brain injuries are more likely to lead to dysfunctions than to blissful peace. But the transcendental is too tightly woven into her narrative to be dismissed and, in her opinion, it is the core of the story's popularity. Her tale speaks of detachment, energy, transcendence, inner silence and being at one with all things, making people ask themselves, "Do I have all this inside of me, too?"

Fellow scientists did not react en masse.

"The absence of any experience is a state of pure bliss."

The spark she lit created new possibilities for research, raised skepticism and fired a wide debate. *The New York Times* reported that Dr. Francine M. Benes, director of the Harvard Brain Tissue Resource Center, said, "When I saw her on the TED video, at first I thought, 'Oh my God, is she losing it.'" Dr. Taylor says that most colleagues are warmly supportive, or at least amiably intrigued. Opposition, she says, is rare, but can be vicious. "We scientists label things, but normally do not experience them," she told HINDUISM TODAY. "In my story, I use two forbidden words, *energy* and *consciousness*. There is an idea that, if you are a serious researcher, you can never use these terms."

Current scientific consensus recognizes her experience, but not her conclusions. Research by Dr. Newman and Dr. D'Aquili (*Why God Won't Go Away*, Ballantine, NY, 2001) investigated how mystic experiences

stimulate certain areas of the brain. In their experiment, Tibetan meditators and Franciscan nuns in contemplation signaled when they felt connected with God, or the Absolute. SPECT scans of that moment showed a sharp decline in the activity of their left brain while the right hemisphere did not markedly change pace.

But Dr. Taylor's bravery lies in the assertion that rather than experiencing the "delusion" of God-consciousness, she touched real perceptions of an unexplored facet of reality, one as true as ordinary life—should we only learn to reach it.

She is not comfortable with being called a mystic. To her, she is still a scientist, but also a person who discovered infinite possibilities within herself and everyone else. HINDUISM TODAY asked how her discovery took her to a world well mapped by India's ancient yogis and gurus. She replied unassumingly, "I don't know much. I am happy to understand that people have systems that allow them to reach these states of consciousness. I have mine, one that does it for me. But I strongly encourage people to do *something* that will take them to

this precious place inside themselves." Helping others reach the heights she touched is still a significant goal. In her TED lecture she calls, "So who are we? We have the power to choose it, moment by moment. I can step into a consciousness where we are the life-force-power of the universe, and of all the 50 trillion beautiful molecules that make up my form. Or I can choose to step into a consciousness where I become a single individual—a solid, separate from the flow, separate from you. Which would you choose? And when?"

In our minds, she believes, lies the foundation for a new, better world—our microcosms transforming the macrocosm. "I believe that the more time we spend choosing the deep, inner-peace circuitry of our right hemispheres, the more peace we will project into the world—and the more peaceful our planet will be."



The silent stillness of a peaceful mind: Hindu texts on yoga expound that once thoughts are quelled, compassion and bliss naturally arise



HERITAGE

Salvaging India's Hand-Written Heritage

For 70 years Sanskrit scholars have toiled to complete half of a master catalog that, when finished, will preserve an intellectual treasure nearly lost

HINDUISM IS FAMED FOR PRESERVING its key scriptures, the *Vedas*, for thousands of years entirely by rote memorization. There remain today hundreds of pundits who can recite the *Rig, Sama, Yajur* or *Arthava Veda* entirely from memory. This feat, a key factor in the preservation of the faith over the centuries, obscures the reality that all the rest of the Hindu scriptures were, in fact, written down. They were usually etched into specially prepared palm leaf strips and recopied generation after generation. Millions of these manuscripts, mostly in Sanskrit, now languish in libraries across India, Europe and America.

Late in the 19th century, scholars in India realized the importance of keeping track of these manuscripts, and the first attempt was made to create a *Catalogus Catalogorum*, literally, a "catalog of catalogs," indexing all the collections. The project was abandoned in 1903 after just two volumes were published. Then in 1935, the *New Catalogus Catalogorum* was launched by the University of Madras. Headed by Prof. Kuppuswami Sastri, the NCC project, as it is known, published its first volume, "A," in 1949.

NCC researchers collected catalogs and simple "hand lists" issued by India's various institutions. The latter contain little

information beyond titles. In some cases the workers personally inventoried entire collections. They supplemented this information with citations to manuscripts referenced in research journals but not listed anywhere else.

The NCC project has suffered from paucity of staff and funds over the decades, publishing as of 2009 19 volumes of a total of 40 that will constitute the entire work. Indologist Dr. Klaus Klostermaier called those books "the most valuable bibliographic resource for professionals." Dr. Abhiramasundaram of Chennai calls NCC a "wonderful project" of immense help to researchers. The latest volumes were funded with grants from India's freshly launched National Mission for Manuscript (www.namami.org) and produced under the new direction of Dr. Siniruddha Dash (www.unom.ac.in/marinaksanskrit.html), head of the Madras University Sanskrit Department.

Methods: Cataloging Catalogs

When HINDUISM TODAY's staff visited the project in early 2009, some 15 scholars and students were busy sorting by hand the hundreds of thousands of entries that make up the total catalog. Immersed as we all are in the computer world today, it is easy to for-

get just what is required to create a database "by hand." In this project, they began in the 1930s by copying catalog entries onto small slips of paper, which were then sorted alphabetically by title. The process has taken decades and is far from over. Dozens of armchairs line the project's main rooms, each containing tens of thousands of slips of paper in various stages of sorting. Some slips are now so old that they are disintegrating.

Once the titles have been assembled for the one or two letters of the Sanskrit alphabet that will comprise the next volume, Dash's staff tediously cross-check each entry with the original source. It is particularly critical that the Sanskrit entries be spelled correctly, a proofreading task which Dash himself undertakes at the end when the information is entered into a computer database prior to publishing.

The project remains underfunded. The present staff has been working unpaid for 18 months, awaiting a promised grant. Behind Dr. Dash's desk is displayed a large list of needs, money for scholars, assistants, computers, etc., and the need for funding is never far from his mind or conversation.

Project Importance

"Together, these millions of manuscripts con-

The team: (left) Most of the University of Madras cataloging team gather with project head Dr. Dash (center). In front of Dr. Dash are the published catalog volumes.

stitute the 'memory' of India's history, heritage and thought. They lie scattered across the country and beyond, in numerous institutions as well as private collections, often unattended and undocumented," states the National Mission for Manuscripts website.

There are historical causes for this neglect. Throughout the ages, Sanskrit was the common language of India's literature, both sacred and secular. But in the 19th century, under British rule, an abrupt change took place which had devastating impact upon the very continuity of the Indian civilization: Sanskrit ceased to be the medium of education. This decision, decreed by Lord Macauley, was as far-reaching as his simultaneous, but better known goal: to create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect," set forth in 1835. As a result, English replaced Sanskrit as the lingua franca of India's educated classes, and all the history, law, culture, science and religion contained in the Sanskrit literature withered.

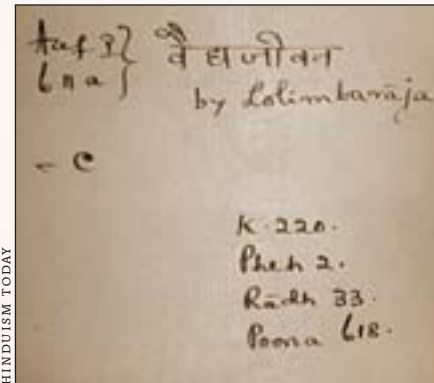
A related impact came from the introduction of printing. The palm-leaf writing technology was slowly abandoned—and few of its texts were ever put into printed books. The recopying ceased. Today all the manuscripts are at least a century old. Depending on the level of care, a palm-leaf manuscript can last up to several centuries.

Critical Editions

Modern scholarship emphasizes the creation of critical editions of ancient texts. These are made by comparing all known manuscripts of a certain text. When ambiguities appear, the scholar takes his best guess as to the intent of the original author, and lists all other possible interpretations in footnotes. It is a tedious process which can take ten to twenty years for a lengthy text, and there are today few scholars with the skill.

To compare all known manuscripts, one has to find them, hence the need for the *New Catalogus Catalogorum*. It is a scholar's map to resources. Slowing the scholar down in his task is the requirement to personally visit the repository of each version of his text—an issue which now stands to be revolutionized by digitization. Under both government and NGO auspices, projects are underway across the world to preserve the world's ancient texts in digital format. The effort has become much easier and cheaper with the advent of low-cost digital cameras, which replace expensive customized scanners.

Digitization addresses two priorities: preserving the manuscripts and preparing



Tracking a manuscript: (top) A shelf of palm-leaf manuscripts at the French Institute of Pondicherry, one of South India's major collections; (middle) two neatly-scribed leaves from Viramahesvara Paddhati, a collection of Shakti scriptures; (left) a single catalog entry slip in Sanskrit and English of a commentary on Lolimbaraja's Vaidyajejevana which is available in four libraries, including Poona

worship—the mainstay of Hindu religious practice. Hindus complain that no one can explain to them the mystical reasons for ritual worship; that is because the *Agamas* are not readily available.

Unknown Texts

It was only in 1904 that the *Artha Shastra* came to light, a remarkable text over 2,000 years old that details the advanced political knowledge of India at the time. Just recently, evidence was discovered in Kerala that Jesuit priests sent accounts of Indian discoveries in mathematics to Europe as early as the 16th century. There is a new theory that Isaac Newton used the information in developing calculus, but that the Indian source of his discoveries remained unrecognized. No one knows what other great knowledge may remain hidden in an ancient manuscript on a dusty shelf, or what key discovery will be proven to be Indian in origin. The cataloging and digitizing of manuscripts will greatly increase the likelihood of new discoveries.

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Dimensions of Service

Vedanta teaches four ways we can serve our fellow man, according to their needs and our resources

BY SWAMI YUKTATMANANDA

THE UPANISHADS TEACH US THAT WE ARE NOT LIMITED INDIVIDUALS consisting of a body and a mind, but are divine in the core of our being. Our divine essence, called the *atman*, is the eternal source of all purity, power, strength, bliss and fulfillment. But being ignorant of this truth, we identify ourselves with our body and mind, seeking lasting peace and happiness in ephemeral things. However, after having our share of pleasure and pain from the world, we begin to understand the futility of worldly pursuits and that only a search for the Eternal Reality can lead us to true fulfillment.

One way to approach this Reality is by rendering service to all with an attitude of worshiping God, who dwells in all. Such service purifies our mind and awakens the infinite dimension of our being. There are several kinds of service corresponding to various levels of our personality. According to the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, we have five different selves. These selves are layers of our being that cover up the *atman*, our real "I."

1. Physical self (*annamaya atman*): We are the physical self when we identify with our body. We look upon ourselves and others as a man or woman, young or old, dark or fair, and think and act accordingly.

2. Energy self (*pranamaya atman*): Usually translated as the life breath, *prana* is responsible for the functions of breathing, assimilation of food, excretion, circulation of blood and the exit of the life breath from the body at death. *Prana* activates our hidden mental impressions (*samskaras*), which influence our thoughts, actions and behavior. In the dream state, *prana* stimulates the mental impressions that create dreams.

3. Mental self (*manomaya atman*): As mental selves, we identify with the mind's desires, emotions and feelings, such as pain and pleasure, love and hatred. Due to imagining that we are the mental self, we are tossed about by the varying states of the mind: happy, calm and peaceful; or miserable, confused and tense.

4. Intelligence self (*vijnanamaya atman*): When we identify with *buddhi*, or the higher mind, we are the intelligence self, from which stems our sense of judgment, decision making, discrimination and living a righteous life. Identified with *buddhi*, we are able to exercise self-control and discipline our wayward mind.

5. Blissful self (*anandamaya atman*): As blissful selves, we are detached from the other four layers of our personality and abide close to the *atman*, only removed from it by a fine screen of ignorance. Because of its proximity to the *atman*, this self is the source of bliss, unfiltered through the body, mind and senses. In the waking state, the ability to abide as the blissful self is a sign of some degree of spiritual realization. We also experience this bliss while listening with joy to elevating music or admiring an elegant work of art. We experience this bliss in deep sleep, though we are not conscious of it.

Swami Vivekananda classifies service into four types. They correspond to the different selves described above.

1. Physical help (*anna dana*): Physical help is related to the

physical self, or body, and takes the form of giving food, clothing or shelter and any service relating to the upkeep of the body.

2. Saving life (*prana dana*): Saving a life, healing or extending it by medical means are ways of serving others practically.

3. Giving knowledge (*vidya dana*): This is not just making people literate, but giving them the knowledge they need to stand on their own feet, think for themselves and solve their own problems. Dissemination of strengthening and character-building ideas also falls under this type of service to the mental self of others. Swami Vivekananda advocated "that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet" (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 5342).

4. Spiritual help (*jnana dana*): Awakening people to the goal of God Realization, helping them strengthen their will and their power of discrimination, giving them spiritual instruction—these are directed to both the intelligence and blissful selves. Such help toward others gradually awakens the *buddhi*, shows the way to the blissful self and, finally, reveals the pure *atman*.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "The gift of spirituality and spiritual knowledge is the highest; the next gift is the gift of secular knowledge; the next is the gift of life; and the fourth is the gift of food." In his lectures on karma yoga, Swami Vivekananda discussed this gradation of the various types of service. He said that physical help does not remove wants permanently and does not transform the recipient's character. In other words, it does not result in de-identification with the physical self. Swami Vivekananda sounds a note of caution about physical help: "In considering the question of helping others, we must always strive not to commit the mistake of thinking that physical help is the only help that can be given. It is not only the last but the least, because it cannot bring about permanent satisfaction. The misery that I feel when I am hungry is satisfied by eating, but hunger returns; my misery can cease only when I am satisfied beyond all want."

Saving a life or prolonging it is a little higher than physical help. But mere extension of life without a qualitative change in it does not help the recipient advance towards the goal of life. Next is the gift of knowledge or education. In Swami Vivekananda's words, "The gift of knowledge is a far higher gift than that of food and clothes; it is even higher than giving life to a man, because the real life of man consists of knowledge. Ignorance is death, knowledge is life. Life is of very little value if it is a life in the dark, groping through ignorance and misery... The gift of spirituality and spiritual knowledge is the highest, for it saves [one] from many and many a birth."

The higher we evolve spiritually, the higher the kind of service we are able to render. But we need not refrain from offering service to others just because we are not able to offer the highest service of spirituality. Giving food, saving or extending life, providing education—all are important on the road to spiritual realization when rendered with an attitude of worship.

SWAMI YUKTATMANANDA is the minister of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York, New York, and former editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*: Awakened India, the Ramakrishna Mission's flagship English language monthly journal on religion and philosophy.



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Hindu Heritage Endowment

HINDU AMERICAN FOUNDATION MAKES VIVID CASE FOR SUPPORT

Sheetal Shah, backed by PowerPoint images of anti-Hindu websites and negative headlines in the US press, summarized the work of the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) for more than 250 of its supporters who had gathered at the banquet room of the Grand Indian Buffet in Sunnyvale, California, on November 7, 2008.

For more than twenty minutes, Ms. Shah, HAF’s Director of Development, spoke urgently of the ignorance and misunderstandings the five-year-old Foundation battles on behalf of the American Hindu community.

“One US Congressman asked us whether we were Sunnis or Shiites,” she said to her mostly Hindu-American audience who reacted with weak laughter and groans.

An energetic and fluent public speaker, she warned her audience that passive acceptance of Hindu stereotypes, virulent anti-Hindu websites or ignorance by US politicians of the Hindu commitment to understanding, tolerance and pluralism won’t do in the United States.

“Other ethnic groups are far ahead of us,” she lamented.

“They provide us with models we can follow, both in educational effectiveness and fundraising.” She explained that HAF, along with raising current dollars, is also urging its supporters to include the organization in their estate plans.

She added that those who want to provide permanent support to HAF’s work can do so through two funds recently established at Hindu Heritage Endowment (HHE):

- Hindu American Foundation Endowment (fund #75) provides general support to HAF’s work of advocating causes on behalf of the Hindu American community.
- Endowment for Global Hindu Rights (fund #76) supports HAF’s efforts to highlight and correct human rights violations faced by Hindus worldwide.

Born in India, Ms. Shah arrived in the US at age three and was raised in Atlanta, Georgia. She graduated from Georgia Tech with a degree in computer science. A former HAF volunteer, she joined HAF’s Manhattan office after completing a Masters Degree in Development Management at the London School of Economics (LSE). “New York is a fabulous place,” she told HINDUISM TODAY. “I love its energy, its mix of people and its acceptance of diversity. No one looks at you oddly in this city.”

She feels that this new link with the Hindu Heritage Endowment will bring HAF to full fundraising maturity, making available to its supporters permanent endowed funds, bequests, charitable remainder trusts and other sophisticated estate gifts.

Since its founding in 2002, HAF has grown rapidly from the inaugural gathering of a handful of volunteers at the Philadelphia home of its co-founder and board president, Dr. Mihir Meghani, an emergency room physician now living in Fremont, California. In 2008 HAF raised just over \$400,000 from about 1,000 supporters. Ms. Shah, however, feels HAF and the Hindu-American community are in their infancy as effective advocates and educators. “We need to shape the local and global debate with our children’s interests in mind. We cannot afford to be passive when faced with misinformation about Hinduism.”

Visit the Hindu American Foundation website at www.HAFsite.org



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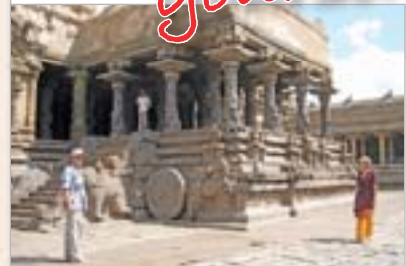
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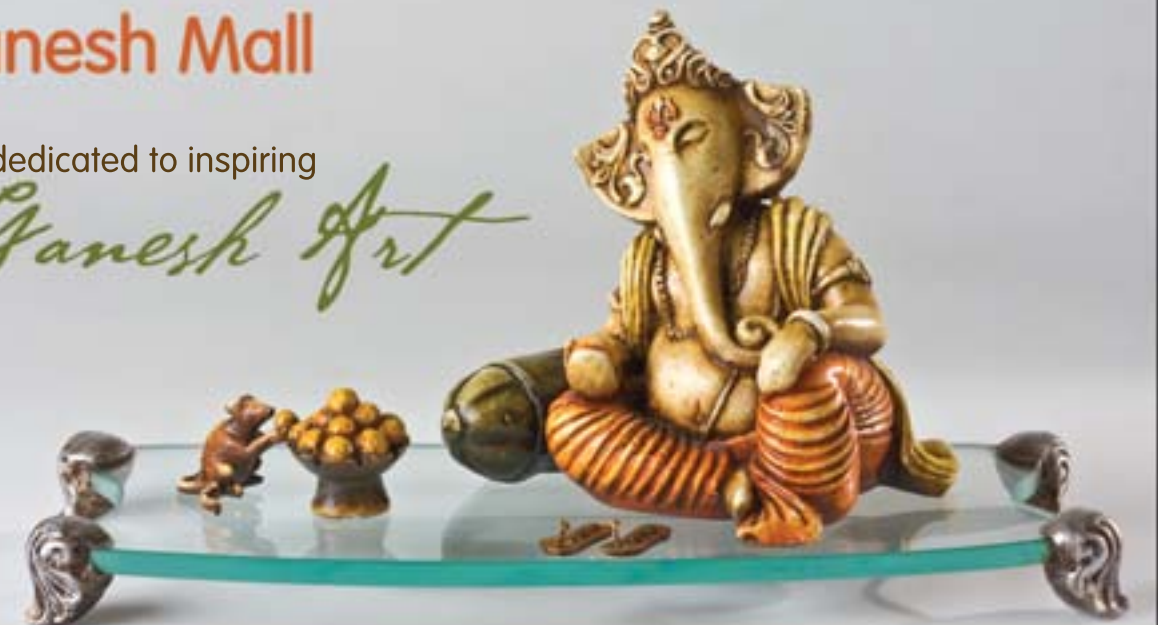
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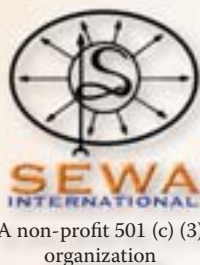
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80,000 Bhutanese refugees still live in makeshift camps in Nepal. Many of them will be coming to the USA soon.



Left, youngsters of Bhutanese families visiting a Hindu temple in Cleveland. Right, Bhutanese worshipers at a temple in New Hampshire. The visits were arranged by Sewa International in cooperation with the temple and local organizations.



Left, volunteers assist refugees at a job fair and training session organized by SEWA International. Right, Bhutanese families worshipping at a temple in Sacramento during a visit organized by SEWA in cooperation with the temple.

1992, the ouster. For purposes of ethnic cleansing, Bhutan summarily expelled its entire Lhotshampas population (mostly Hindu) 17 years ago. Most of them took refuge in Nepal where they have lived in squalid camps ever since.

The USA opens its doors. In 2008-2009, the USA offered refuge to this displaced people. So far, under a UN-approved migration plan, 15,000 have arrived and another 45,000 are expected within the next four years.

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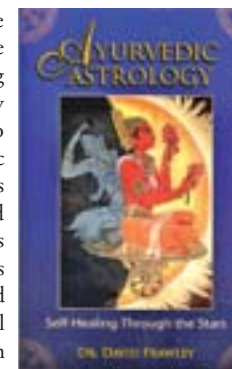
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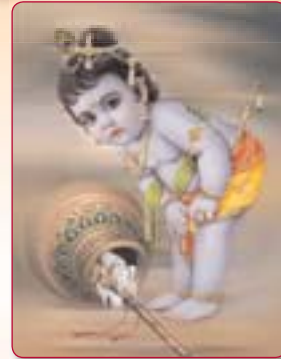
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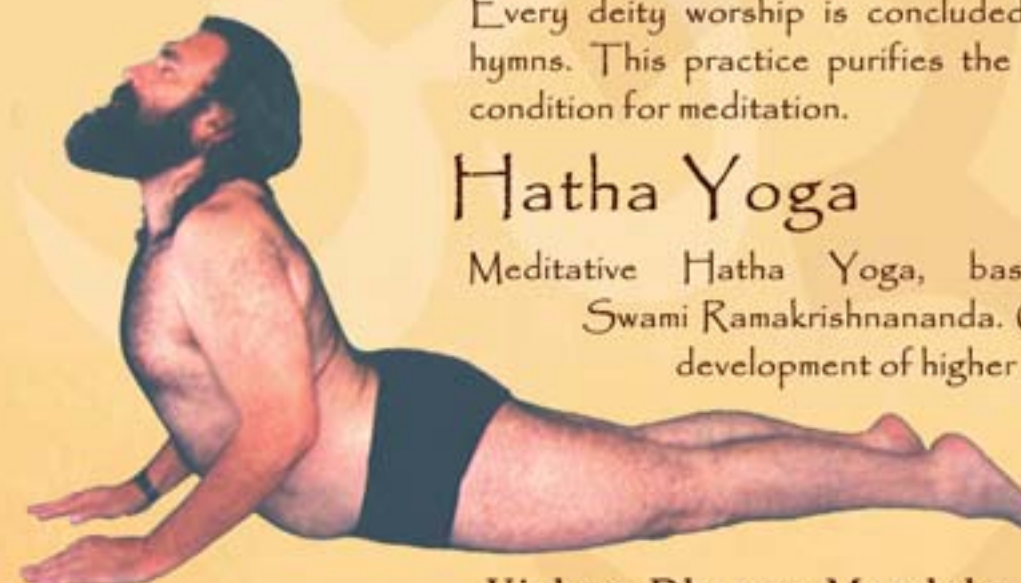
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Hole-in-the-Wall reaches Mizoram and Nagaland  HiWEL has recently signed MoUs	Global ICT Excellence Award for HiWEL  HiWEL, a joint venture between NIIT	Jaipur gets its first Playground Learning Centers  The Mayor of Jaipur, Mr. Ashok	A new way to learn What have we found How it all started		

(Clockwise from above) The HiWEL website provides clear, well-organized data on their programs; one child shows others how to use the computer; groups of children create a remarkable learning dynamic in the absence of any adult educator; the first kiosk site in Delhi in a wall between the NIIT offices and the adjacent slum

EDUCATORS IN FIRST WORLD NATIONS typically question the return on investment of adding more technology to schools. Studies indicate that computers raise test scores among affluent youth only by a small fraction. But Indian researchers have discovered a completely different scenario.

Kalkaji's Hole in the Wall

Dr. Sugata Mitra, Chief Scientist at National Institute of Information Technology (NIIT), is credited with the breakthrough in what is today known as minimally invasive education. As early as 1982, he had been toying with the idea of unsupervised learning and computers. His first field test began on January 26, 1999. Dr. Mitra's team carved a hole in the wall that separated the NIIT premises from the adjoining slum in Kalkaji, New Delhi, and installed a freely accessible computer. The NIIT in-house research lab monitored the effects of the experiment. Children were instantly drawn to the come-one, come-all computer. In six months, with almost no adult input, they taught themselves basic Windows functions, browsing, painting, chatting and e-mail, games, educational programs, music downloads and video playing.

Education for the Masses

After documenting the success of two more kiosks, now called Playground Learning Sta-

tions (PLS), in 2001 NIIT joined forces with International Finance Corporation (a part of The World Bank Group) to launch HiWEL. Today, more than a decade after the first hole in the wall was cut, HiWEL runs 55 PLS in Delhi, 250 additional ones across India and 20 projects in African countries, including Uganda, Rwanda, Mozambique, Zambia, Botswana, Nigeria and Cambodia. More than 300,000 children have benefited from the not-for-profit reaching its hand through a wall, and that number is expected to double in 2009 with the installation of more than 200 new stations.

To find out about the amazing learning dynamics of a group of children who are left alone to collaborate, with nothing but a computer and their curiosity, go www.hole-in-the-wall.com. And don't miss Dr. Mitra's TED talk at www.ted.com (search "Sugata"). He describes one test where a PLS was placed in a remote village where no one spoke a word of English. When researchers later returned, to everyone's surprise, one child looked up and said in English, "We need a faster processor and a better mouse!"

Dr. Mitra doesn't believe the project has reached its full potential. "We don't know what the limits to this kind of learning are. Imagine 100 million children growing up inside cyberspace as opposed to their 1,000 BCE villages. It would change our society forever."

